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Greater openness, shared benefits

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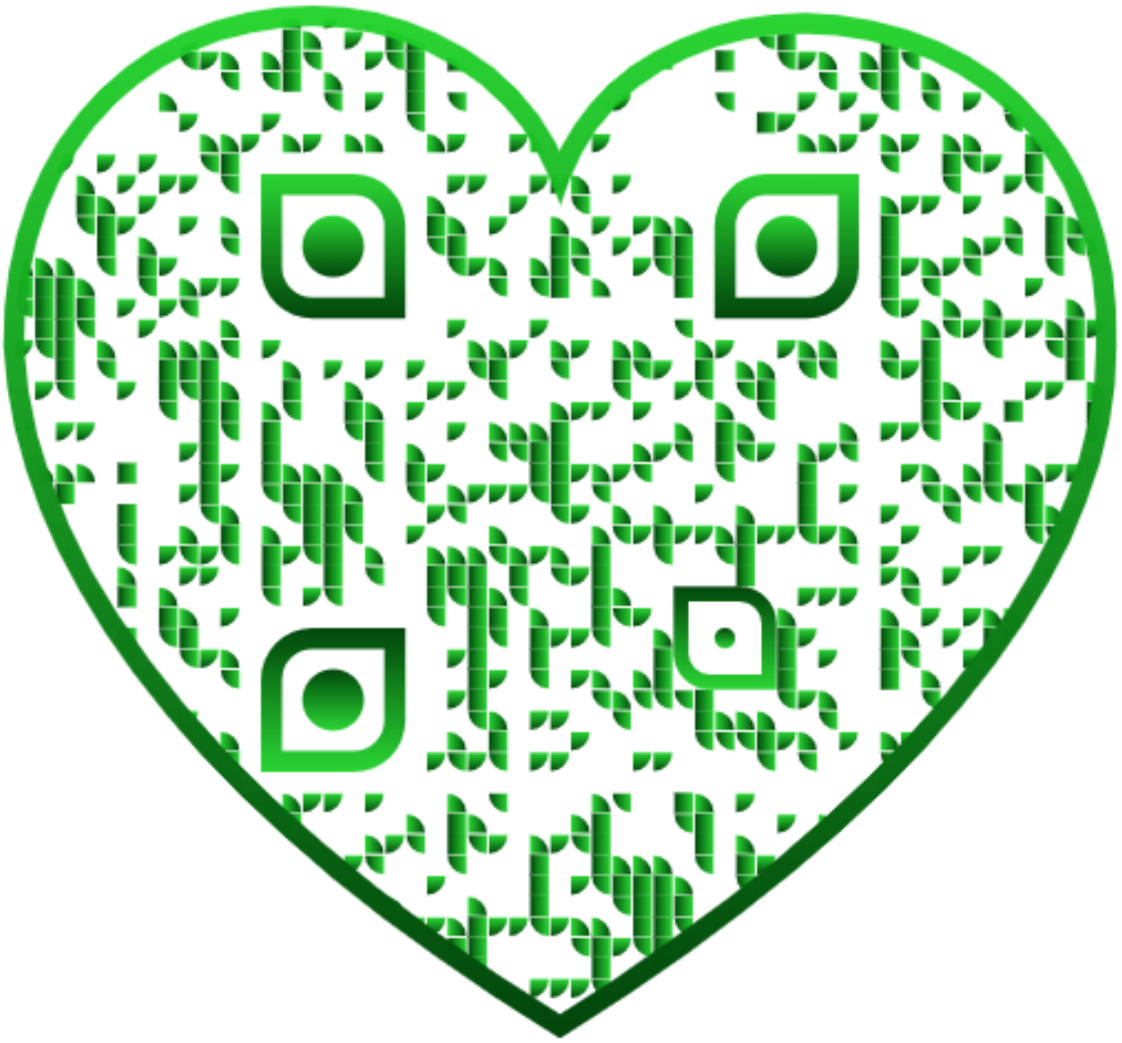

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Cover Photo: The Eighth China International Import Expo opens in Shanghai on November 5 (WEI YAO)

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New Horizons

In 1978, China embarked on a path toward greater openness and connectivity with the international community, undertaking economic reform, promoting two-way trade and inviting foreign investment. The successful implementation of these first changes and those in subsequent stages of China's reform and opening-up process has brought China more than 40 years of rapid modernization, increasing prosperity and closer ties across the world.

Now, as the details of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) are being finalized, China is preparing to enter a new stage of international openness. In its recommendations for the formulation of the plan, issued on October 23, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China called for the promotion of high-standard opening up and the creation of new horizons for mutually beneficial cooperation.

Specifically, the recommendations advocate the continued expansion of opening up at the institutional level, the safeguarding of the multilateral trading system and the promotion of broader international economic flows. The document underlines the importance of taking the initiative to open China wider, promoting the innovative development of trade, creating greater space for two-way investment cooperation and pursuing high-quality Belt and Road cooperation.

While the traditional model primarily attracted investment and trade through preferential policies such as tax incentives, institutional opening up emphasizes aligning domestic rules and systems with global best practice. It focuses on systemic reforms in legal frameworks, market access and regulatory practices to create a fair, transparent and predictable business environment. For instance, the recommendations urge greater openness in technological innovation, trade in services and industrial development. They also call for a more liberal renminbi capital account, which records the flow of investment and asset ownership in and out of China.

The Central Committee also recommended this greater openness be used as a source of momentum to propel China's own reform and development and to continue promoting common development by sharing opportunities with the rest of the world. China's experience demonstrates the tremendous value of globalization for building economies and improving living standards, particularly for countries of the Global South.

Through high-standard opening up, continued economic and social development, experience sharing and increased participation in global governance, China aims to defend and promote globalization as a path to greater shared prosperity. **BR**

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CIRCUS FESTIVAL

Acrobats perform during the opening ceremony of the eighth China International Circus Festival in Hengqin, an island in Zhuhai, Guangdong Province, on November 1. The event brought together 18 elite circus troupes from around the world and nearly 500 performers.

Since its launch in 2013, the festival has become a key platform for cultural exchange between Chinese and international circus performers.

XINHUA

Showcasing Sichuan Cuisine

Spectators watch a Sichuan cuisine cooking skills competition during the eighth World Sichuan Cuisine Conference, held in Leshan, Sichuan Province, on November 1.

Giant Panda Base

China has launched a new giant panda base in Sichuan Province to bolster panda breeding, as well as research and international communication, expanding the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda (CCRCGP) to five sites nationwide.

As part of China's broader push for ecosystem and biodiversity protection, the new facility began trial operations after 13 pandas were relocated on November 4. The base covers an area of about 120 hectares in Sichuan's Mianyang City. It is expected to open to visitors next year, once the animals have settled into their new environment.

China's fourth national panda survey counted 418 wild giant pandas in Mianyang—about 22.4 percent of the country's total and the highest number among China's prefecture-level cities.

Since the 1980s, the CCRCGP has overcome key challenges in captive breeding, growing the population steadily from just six pandas in 1983 to over 380 today.

AI Application

The National Health Commission and four other authorities have called for the broader application of AI in the country's health sector over the coming years, according to a document released by all five authorities and made public on November 4.

By 2030, intelligent diagnosis and treatment assistance will be universal in basic terms across China's primary-level medical institutions, including community and village clinics, per a goal set out in the document.

Meanwhile, hospitals at or above the second grade in China's three-tier hospital system will widely adopt AI technologies such as intelligent medical-imaging diagnosis and clinical decision-making support technologies.

The document also suggests expanded AI use in patient services, enabling hospitals to offer integrated intelligent services throughout the entire treatment process, including precise appointment-scheduling, triage and pre-diagnosis and follow-up services.

Additionally, China plans to upgrade its intelligent epidemiological investigation systems to provide real-time, precise support for infectious disease prevention and control decision-making.

Water-Saving Equipment

China has unveiled a plan to achieve technological breakthroughs by 2027 in the development of water-saving equipment for key areas including water supply, utilization and recycling, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) announced on November 3.

The plan, jointly released by MIIT and the Ministry of Water Resources, emphasizes that water-saving equipment is a cornerstone of the water conservation industry and plays a pivotal role in safeguarding national water security.

By 2027, China aims to master a suite of core technologies with independent intellectual property rights and commercialize advanced technologies in smart water management and other related areas.

Simultaneously, a more comprehensive system of standards for water-saving equipment should be established and a group of leading enterprises in this field should be cultivated.

By 2030, China aims to become a global leader in water-saving equipment, building a comprehensive and advanced system that can reliably supply high-performance, efficient and durable products.

Three Gorges Project Benefits

Marking five years since its overall completion on November 1, the Three Gorges Project has solidified its role as a multi-functional backbone of China's Yangtze River management, delivering extensive benefits in flood control, power generation, water supply and shipping.

Over the past five years, the project has intercepted more than 29 billion cubic meters of floodwater through coordinated operation with upstream reservoirs, substantially mitigating flood risks in the middle and lower reaches.

As a core clean energy base, the Three Gorges power plant has generated over 423 billion kilowatt (kw)-hours of electricity, equivalent to saving 128 million tons of standard coal and reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 347 million tons.

The project has also secured water supply for downstream

regions during dry seasons, replenishing 82.4 billion cubic meters of water to support industrial, domestic, and ecological needs.

Shipping efficiency has continued to rise, with the cargo volume passing through the locks exceeding 700 million tons in the past five years. Annual freight volume topped 150 million tons for three consecutive years, hitting a record 168 million tons in 2023. The ship lift, serving as a rapid transit corridor, has handled more than 1.7 million passengers and 15 million tons of cargo.

Since its construction began in 1994, the Three Gorges project has evolved into a comprehensive water-control system featuring a 2,309-meter-long and 185-meter-high dam, twin five-tier ship locks, and 34 turbo-generators with a total capacity of 22.5 million kw.

Renewable Energy Capacity

China has made every effort to promote the increased scale and high-quality development of renewable energy, the National Energy Administration (NEA) said at a press conference on October 31.

China's newly installed renewable energy power generation capacity surged 47.7 percent year on year to 310 million kw in the first three quarters of this year.

The figure accounted for 84.4 percent of the country's total newly installed power generation capacity.

Of the total, newly installed hydropower, wind power, photovoltaic power and biomass power capacities came in at 7.16 million kw, 61.09 million kw, 240 million kw and 1.05 million kw, respectively, per NEA data.

This increased capacity has been a robust support for China's power supply, with the country's total renewable energy power generation totaling 2.89 trillion kw-hours in the first three quarters, up 15.5 percent year on year and accounting for approximately 40 percent of China's total power generation.

Arrests and Prosecutions

The numbers of both arrests and prosecutions that China's procuratorates handled fell year on year in the first nine months of 2025, according to data released at a national seminar for senior prosecutors held in Beijing on October 31.

From January to September, prosecutors approved the arrests of approximately 519,600 criminal suspects and filed public prosecutions against 1.05 million people, respective year-on-year declines of 12.9 percent and 11.7 percent.

Authorities continued to address serious violent crimes, including homicide, robbery and kidnapping, prosecuting 39,800 suspects, down 10.8 percent from last year.

In the area of cybercrime, 136,000 people were prosecuted for Internet-related offenses in the three quarters, including 49,000 for telecom and online fraud.

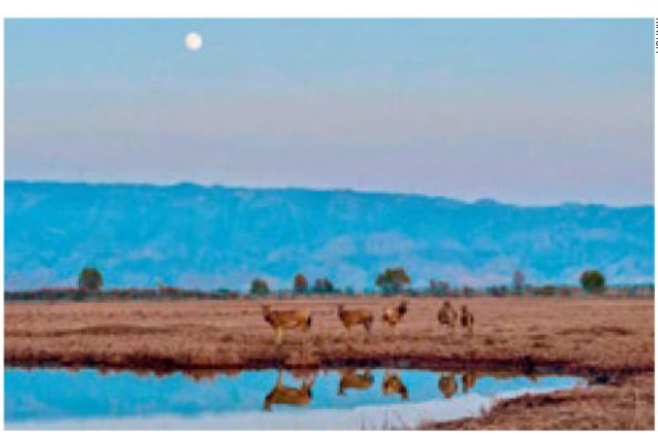
A total of 18,000 individuals were prosecuted for financial fraud or other offenses undermining financial management, while 1,829 were charged with money laundering.

Another 53,000 people were prosecuted for crimes against children, and 69,000 juvenile cases were reviewed—down 2.1 percent and 9.7 percent year on year, respectively.

XINHUA

Immersive Experience

Tourists experience VR gaming during an Internet life carnival at the Puyuan Fashion Resort in Tongxiang City of Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province, on November 5. The carnival, which ran from October 29 to November 9, allowed visitors to experience various scenarios in which digital civilization enhances quality of life.



XINHUA

New Arrivals, New Life

Milu deer at Qingtongxia Reservoir Wetland Nature Reserve, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, on November 4. The reserve, covering a total area of 174.93 square km, is the largest Yellow River flood plain wetland in Ningxia. In September 2024, 35 milu deer were introduced to the reserve. Since then, six fawns have been born there.

Trade in Services

China's trade in services maintained steady growth in the first three quarters of the year, with total imports and exports reaching nearly 5.94 trillion yuan ($833 billion), up 7.6 percent year on year, the Ministry of Commerce said on November 4.

Specifically, exports rose by 14.4 percent to over 2.6 trillion yuan ($364 billion), while imports increased by 2.8 percent to over 3.33 trillion yuan ($467 billion), according to the ministry's data. The deficit narrowed by 238.24 billion yuan ($33.4 billion) compared to the same period last year.

Trade in knowledge-intensive services saw continued growth, with imports and exports totaling about 2.27 trillion yuan ($318 billion), up 6.4 percent year on year.

Travel services trade totaled nearly 1.64 trillion yuan ($230 billion), up 8.8 percent from a year earlier.

Notably, the exports of travel services surged by 54.4 percent during the period, according to the ministry.

Starbucks Expansion

U.S. coffee giant Starbucks Coffee Co. announced on November 4 that it has entered into an agreement to form a joint venture with Boyu Capital, to operate Starbucks retail in China.

Under the agreement, Boyu will hold up to a 60-percent interest in Starbucks' retail operations in China, while Starbucks will retain the remaining 40-percent interest in the joint venture, and continue to own the Starbucks brand and license the brand and intellectual property to the new entity.

Boyu will acquire its interest based on a cash-free, debt-free enterprise value of approximately $4 billion.

The business will continue to be headquartered in Shanghai and will own and operate the 8,000 Starbucks coffeehouses across the Chinese mainland, with a shared vision to grow to as many as 20,000 locations over time.

With the new joint venture, Starbucks expects the total value of its China retail business to exceed $13 billion.

Starbucks opened a store in Beijing in 1999, marking its official entry into the Chinese mainland market. Boyu, founded in 2011, is an alternative asset management company that has been deeply rooted in the Chinese market and has a global presence.

Marine Economy

China's gross ocean product totaled 7.9 trillion yuan ($1.1 trillion) in the first three quarters of 2025, a year-on-year increase of 5.6 percent, according to data released by the Ministry of Natural Resources on November 3.

The output of marine crude oil increased by 3 percent year on year, the output of marine natural gas increased by 17.7 percent, and the output of marine aquatic products by 4.8 percent, the data show.

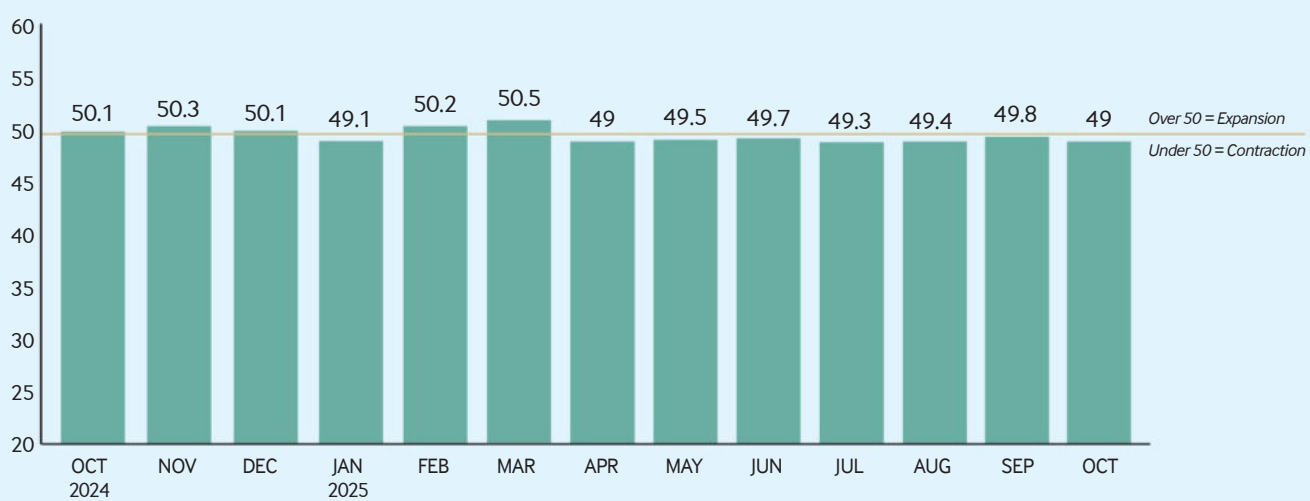
The marine transportation industry saw steady development, and the marine tourism industry maintained its recovery trend. Cruise tourism gained increasing popularity, with coastal ports across the country receiving 2.05 million cruise passengers, a year-on-year surge of 28 percent.

Emerging marine industries accelerated their development, with the newly connected offshore wind power capacity increasing by 42.1 percent year on year. The marine information services industry grew at an accelerated pace, with AI technologies driving the growth of the overall marine industry in China.

In the first nine months, 18 marine enterprises completed initial public offerings (IPOs) and raised a cumulative 26 billion yuan ($3.6 billion), accounting for 33.7 percent of the total financing scale of all IPO enterprises during the period.

NUMBERS

China's Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI)



EV Charging Infrastructure

Electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure continued its rapid expansion in China in the first three quarters of this year, with the total number of facilities in the country surging by 54.5 percent year on year to 18.06 million units by the end of September, according to official data released on October 31.

This growing network has effectively met the charging demand of some 40 million EVs across the country, Tan Hongjiang, an official of the National Energy Administration, told a press conference.

The combined rated power of public EV charging facilities was approximately 200 million kilowatt at the end of September, an increase of 59.2 percent from the start of the year, Tan said.

He noted that the sector has also achieved breakthroughs in new technologies and business models, including the rollout of high-power charging networks and smart charging systems.

In October, China unveiled a three-year action plan to improve the country's EV charging infrastructure, aiming to establish a nationwide network of 28 million charging facilities by the end of 2027.

Steel Product Structure

The product structure of China's steel industry has been optimized during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), with high-end steel products increasingly used in automobiles, home appliances, infrastructure and construction, according to the China Iron and Steel Association.

Jiang Wei, vice president of the association, said on October 31 that the share of steel used in the manufacturing sector rose from 42 percent in 2020 to 50 percent in 2024 and is expected to exceed 50 percent in 2025.

The proportion of steel utilized in the construction sector fell from 58 percent in 2020 to 50 percent last year, Jiang added.

Over the past five years, research concerning and production of high-end steel products have gathered pace. For instance, the output of silicon steel, one of the most representative high-end products, reached about 18 million tons in 2024, up 48 percent from 2020.

The shift of China's economy toward higher-quality and greener growth has fueled demand for advanced and eco-friendly steel products and created vast space and promising prospects for the industry's upgrading, Jiang explained.

Lithium Products Supply

China has established a complete supply system for lithium products, the China Nonferrous Metals Industry Association said on October 29.

The country's output of key lithium products, including lithium carbonate, lithium hydroxide and cathode materials for lithium-ion batteries, has ranked first globally for years, association official Lin Ruhai said at a press conference.

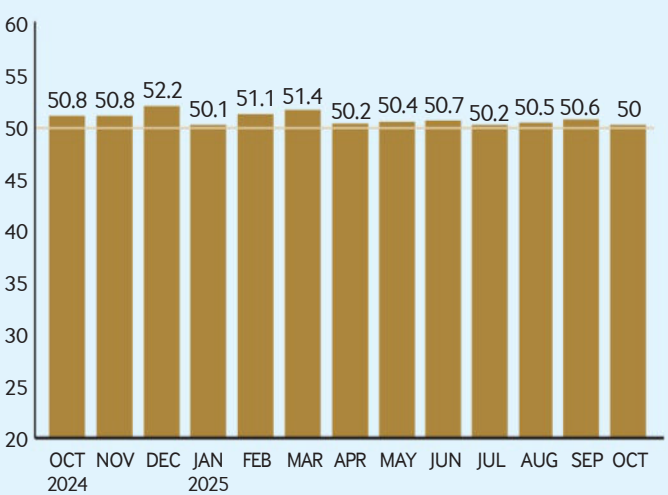
In the first three quarters of this year, the country's output of lithium carbonate totaled approximately 588,000 tons, while its lithium hydroxide output came in at roughly 303,000 tons, data show.

Lin noted that China's lithium-ion battery industry enjoys a complete, large-scale industrial chain that covers the full life cycle from resource development to recycling.

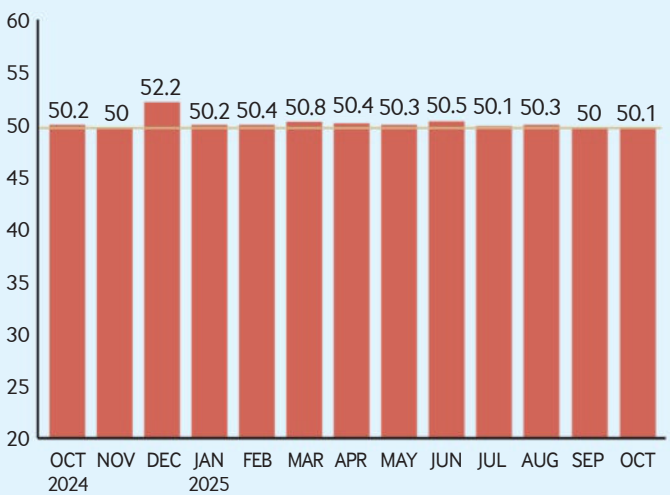
He said the country's fast-growing EV and energy storage markets have created vast space for technological innovation and capacity utilization.

In 2024, the country's EV output and sales each exceeded 12 million, topping global rankings for a 10th consecutive year.

China's Comprehensive PMI



China's Non-Manufacturing PMI



(Source: *National Bureau of Statistics*)

EGYPT

Visitors gather around the colossus of ancient Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II at the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza on November 4. The museum opened to the public on November 1 after two decades of construction

UNITED STATES

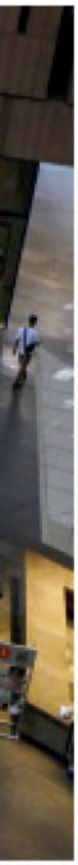
Federal employees receive free meals at a food distribution stall in Washington, D.C. on November 5, the 36th day of the federal government shutdown, now the longest in the country's history

XINHUA

XINHUA

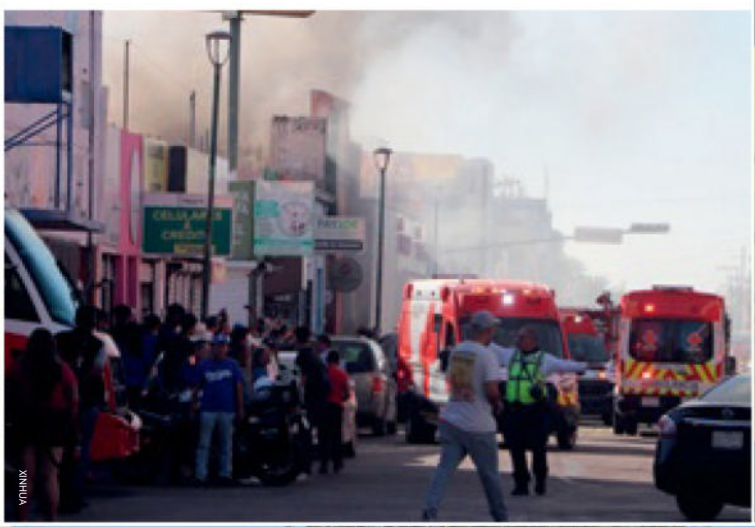
SPAIN

An aerial view of booths at the 2025 Smart City Expo World Congress in Barcelona on November 4



MEXICO

A crowd gathers near a fire-damaged chain department store in Hermosillo, Sonora State, on November 1. At least 22 people were killed after an explosion triggered the fire



KENYA

President William Ruto attends a groundbreaking ceremony for a Chinese-funded green fertilizer project in Nakuru County on November 3

THE PHILIPPINES

Residents return to their damaged homes after the massive flood brought by typhoon *Kalmaegi* in Cebu Province on November 5. The death toll had reached 114 at time of printing, with many others missing or injured

PHYSICIST CARRIES HISTORIC TORCH

On November 2 in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, physicist **Xue Qikun**, a member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, set off on the historic cross-boundary torch relay for China's 15th National Games.

It was the first-ever cross-boundary relay in the event's history, carrying the flame to Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions. The 15th National Games are being held from November 9 to 21 in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao.

Xue, winner of the State Preeminent Science and Technology Award, China's top science honor, for 2023, has dedicated his career to fundamental research in materials physics. At Tsinghua University, he led a team that first observed the quantum anomalous Hall effect in 2012, a major breakthrough.

He has been president of Southern University of Science and Technology in Shenzhen since November 2020.

Embracing the Machine On Screen

People's Daily
November 4

With the rapid rise of homegrown video generators like Dreamina and Kling, more domestic short dramas are now being created entirely by AI, from script to visual effects.

In July 2024, *Sanxingdui: Future Apocalypse*, an AI-generated sci-fi series, became the first of its kind to receive a domestic distribution licence. A year later, Kling unveiled *Loading*, the world's first fully AI-animated anthology. Beyond China, global platforms are also embracing AI-generated content. Netflix, for instance, saw the release of *The Eternaut*, an Argentine sci-fi drama that made extensive use of AI in its production.

Industry insiders point to dramatic gains in productivity. A single creator armed with up-to-date AI tools can now generate one to two episodes a day, at less than a 10th of the cost of traditional live-action shoots. However, while quantity is no longer the hurdle, quality is. The task ahead is to elevate technically proficient content into storytelling that feels fresh, layered and emotionally resonant.

The emerging imperative is clear: Embrace the machine, but don't lose the human. As the technology races ahead, the value of distinctive voice, taste and imagination is only set to rise.

A River Reborn

China Newsweek
October 27

For decades, the Yangtze River—China's longest waterway and a critical habitat for aquatic life—became a case study in ecological decline, as overfishing and other human activities drained life from its waters. By the late 2010s, its bio-integrity index had plunged to the lowest rating: "no fish."

In 2021, a decade-long fishing ban was fully implemented across key conservation areas of the river to restore its ecosystem.

"Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, we have completed an industrialization journey in decades that took developed countries centuries, establishing a comprehensive modern industrial system and nurturing a valuable cultural heritage."

Xin Guobin, Vice Minister of Industry and Information Technology, at the Industrial Culture Development Conference 2025 in Shanghai on November 4

"China's vast and dynamic market has injected strong momentum into CP's business, while the open business environment allows us to innovate and optimize our business models."

Huang Weiwei, Senior Vice President of Thai conglomerate Charoen Pokphand (CP) Group, in an interview with Xinhua News Agency before the Eighth China International Import Expo, held from November 5 to 10

That same year, China rolled out a five-year biodiversity restoration plan aimed at rescuing endangered species and repairing damaged habitats.

Now, as the fishing moratorium reaches its midpoint and the biodiversity initiative nears its deadline, signs of recovery are showing. Between 2021 and 2024, 344 native fish species were spotted in the Yangtze River Basin, an increase of 36 species compared to the 2017-20 period preceding the fishing ban. The Yangtze finless porpoise, often used as a barometer of the river's health, has also edged upward. A 2023 survey counted 1, 249 individuals, the first increase in more than three decades.

The recovery effort concerns not only fish but also people. For generations, countless families in the region made their living on the water and therefore were reluctant to give up fishing activities. To ease the transition, local authorities have rolled out support programs offering housing, job training services and social security subsidies for former fishermen.

Yet there is still a long way to go. The recovery of several endangered species is still slow. The Yangtze is stirring back to life, but securing a full recovery will require decades of persistent effort, not just a decade-long ban.

Tails on Rails

Workers' Daily

November 4

Some Chinese rail passengers have recently noticed a quiet update on 12306, the country's official railway ticketing app, whereby several train routes now carry a small tag bearing the Chinese character for "pet." The label denotes a new service that allows pets to be transported on select routes in designated carriages.

When the service debuted in April, it was limited to 10 trains on the Beijing-Shanghai route. Six months on, it covers roughly 50 routes across the country. Yet the scheme is far from mature. Bookings must be made by phone several days in advance, health certificates are required and costs are comparatively high. Nevertheless, it marks a notable step forward in the railway sector's effort to upgrade its services.

The change is emblematic of a broader move to better integrate pets into the fabric of modern life. In Shanghai, abandoned industrial sites have been converted into exercise areas for pets. In Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, community centers now offer basic veterinary checkups. These changes may seem minor, but they signal shifting social expectations. As pets increasingly become companions rather than accessories, services and public spaces are adapting in step.

CHINA'S RICHEST WOMAN

Zhong Huijuan, 64, has become China's newest richest woman, with a fortune of 141 billion yuan ($19.75 billion), according to the Hurun China Rich List 2025, released by the Shanghai-based Hurun Research Institute in late October.

Zhong is chairwoman and CEO of Hansoh Pharmaceutical Group in Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province.

After graduating in chemistry from Jiangsu Normal University in 1982, Zhong taught at Yan'an Middle School in Lianyungang. In 1995, her husband founded Hansoh Pharmaceutical, and Zhong left teaching to lead the startup.

Hansoh Pharmaceutical went public on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in June 2019, with its market value surpassing HK$209 billion ($26.88 billion) on October 29. Currently, Zhong and her daughter, Sun Yuan, hold 65.61 percent of the company.

"On one hand, AI leverages big data and stronger computing power to empower manufacturing; on the other, AI technology is being incorporated into panel product design, greatly expanding the application space for display panels."

Liang Xinqing, Executive Vice President of the Liquid Crystal Branch of the China Optics and Optoelectronics Manufacturers Association, at the 2025 World Conference on the Innovation and Development of the Display Industry, held in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, on November 3-4

"This clinical surgery marks a key leap from feasibility to practicality in the field of remote high-precision ophthalmic surgery in China."

Lin Haotian from Sun Yat-Sen University's Zhongshan Ophthalmic Center, who led a team of surgeons in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, operating a robotic arm more than 4,000 km away in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, to perform a retinal injection on November 2

COVER STORY

REWIRING OPENNESS

China's pivot toward shared growth in the global economy

By Zhao Wei

XINHUA

The Bank of China Financial Center project in the Lin-gang Special Area of the China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone, Pudong New Area, Shanghai, on August 14, 2024

On the morning of November 1, President Xi Jinping attended the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) chairmanship handover session of the 32nd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Gyeongju, the Republic of Korea (ROK), where he announced that China will host the 33rd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province.

Xi said he looks forward to all parties gathering in Shenzhen next year to jointly discuss the development plans for the Asia-Pacific region and to create a bright future for it.

The selection of Shenzhen to host the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting 2026 holds great significance. Shenzhen's transformation from a small, backward fishing village into a modern international metropolis over the recent decades is described by Xi as a miracle in the history of world development created by the Chinese people. In this process, the city has become an important window into China's unswerving pursuit of a mutually beneficial and win-win opening-up strategy.

Amid rising protectionism, Xi sent a clear message at this year's APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, held on October 31 and November 1, that China will open its door wider and create new opportunities for the Asia-Pacific and the world at large.

The meeting was the first multilateral event attended by Xi following the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which was convened in Beijing from October 20 to 23. That plenary session laid out the CPC Central Committee's recommendations for formulating the country's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), outlining priorities for national economic and social development over the next five years.

The document calls for efforts to promote broader international economic flows, expand opening up at the institutional level, safeguard the multilateral trading system and pursue high-quality Belt and Road cooperation. The China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative aims to boost connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes.

Adhering to open cooperation

At a press conference held by the CPC Central Committee in Beijing on October 24, Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao summarized the opening up of China in three dimensions: a powerful driver for reform and development, a broad avenue bringing benefit to both China and the world, and a firm choice in the face of challenges such as protectionism.

During the 15th Five-Year Plan period, "we will actively align with international high-standard economic and trade rules and expand market access and open up more areas, in particular in the service sector," he said. ▶▶

The development of trade will remain a central pillar of this effort. The document of recommendations underscores the need to promote market diversification and the integrated development of domestic and foreign trade. It also urges efforts to optimize and upgrade trade in goods, expand green trade and trade in intermediate goods and pursue balanced development of imports and exports.

The 138th China Import and Export Fair, commonly known as the Canton Fair, which ran from October 15 to November 4 in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, offered a powerful snapshot of China's opening up. With more than 32,000 exhibitors, the event showcased the vitality of China's manufacturing and innovation. From smart medical devices and service robots to forums on AI and digital trade, it highlighted how technological innovation is driving new forms of global cooperation.

China's next phase of opening up will focus on refining the very institutions that facilitate trade and investment. Policymakers are building the frameworks of what they call institutional opening up, aimed at making China's integration with the global economy deeper, more predictable and more future-ready.

Across the country, a growing network of 22 pilot free trade zones (FTZs) and the Hainan Free Trade Port are leading this transformation. "The FTZs are pacesetters for institutional innovation. Their core task is to explore institutional systems aligned with international norms through pioneering trials in areas such as investment, trade, finance and government function transformation, forming replicable and scalable experiences," Wang Peng, a research fellow at the Institute of State Governance, Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Wuhan, Hubei Province, told *Beijing Review*.

In the performance of their designated tasks, the FTZs have explored innovative solutions. For example, the Dalian area of the Liaoning FTZ in Liaoning Province worked with the Liaoning Maritime Safety Administration to tackle long-standing challenges such as international transport restrictions and high logistics costs for some goods. Through extensive research involving major enterprises and benchmarking against international standards, they developed measures to help businesses navigate export regulations more efficiently while ensuring safety and compliance in overseas shipments. Since their introduction, foreign trade companies have reported tangible gains, notably lower costs and faster export processing for products such as lithium-ion batteries and specialty foods.

In April, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council released a guideline for improving the pilot FTZs, calling for promoting the optimization and upgrading of trade in goods, invigorating the development of trade in services and supporting innovative development in digital trade.

"The institutional innovations of the pilot FTZs will support the new development model by eliminating barriers to the interplay between domestic and international markets, fostering advantages in attracting foreign investment and promoting broader international economic flows," Wang Peng said.

Deepening regional integration

"We should work faster to facilitate regional and bilateral trade and investment agreements, and expand our network of high-standard free trade areas," the CPC Central Committee's recommendations for the 15th Five-Year Plan state.

China's drive to expand the network of high-standard free trade areas spans both domestic reforms and international partnerships. A key development in this strategy was the signing of the China-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Free Trade Area (CAFTA) 3.0 Upgrade Protocol in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on October 28. The upgraded agreement is a new milestone in regional economic cooperation and reflects the deepening economic ties between China and ASEAN, as well as China's broader commitment to regional integration and global trade standards.

The upgrade builds on a solid foundation of partnership between China and ASEAN, which are each other's largest trading partners. In 2024, bilateral trade exceeded $982 billion, a 17-fold increase since the free trade area was first established in 2002. In the first three quarters of this year, total imports and exports increased by 9.6 percent year on year, underscoring the resilience and vitality of their economic partnership.

XINHUA

Visitors browse the smart medical zone at the 138th China Import and Export Fair (Canton Fair) in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, on October 31

XINHUA

A China-made agricultural drone lifts off in Apodi, Brazil, on February 2, 2024

The initiative for CAFTA 3.0 was first proposed by Xi in November 2021, with negotiations officially launched a year later. Over the course of nine rounds of formal talks, the two sides concluded substantive negotiations in October 2024, before the final signing. The outcome reflects a shared long-term vision for deeper regional integration and shared development.

"The signing of upgraded protocol expands cooperation into new areas and advances the development of regional rules. The negotiations focus on emerging sectors like the digital economy, green economy and supply chain connectivity, moving beyond traditional tariff reductions to deeper integration in areas such as digital trade regulations, green standards and certifications and supply chain resilience," Wang Peng said. "Together, this move will shape the rules of regional trade for the future."

Shaping tomorrow's economy

As China steps into the 15th Five-Year Plan period, a new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation is advancing. In the pursuit of greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology, the country's focus is on achieving a leading position in innovation. This vision places industries of the future, those at the crossroads of frontier science and emerging technologies, at the heart of China's modernization strategy.

From quantum technology to hydrogen energy, from brain-computer interfaces to embodied intelligence, the future industrial landscape outlined in the document of recommendations represents not only a set of new economic frontiers but also the blueprint for how China intends to reach the heights of global innovation.

The data tell a clear story: In 2024, China's total research and development (R&D) investment surpassed 3.6 trillion yuan ($507 billion), a 48-percent rise from 2020, with R&D intensity, the ratio of gross domestic expenditure on R&D to GDP, reaching 2.68 percent, above the EU average. Quantum technology, life sciences and materials research are all seeing breakthroughs, while the country remains the global leader in both international patents and scientific papers.

The momentum is also evident at the city level. Major hubs such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Tianjin have rolled out dedicated programs to develop industries of the future, each capitalizing on their respective strengths, from biotechnology and AI to 6G and smart manufacturing. In April, Purple Mountain Laboratories in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, launched the world's first field test network for 6G communication and smart integration. This network provides a platform for research institutions to carry out early-stage testing and theoretical studies on potential 6G technologies. According to the team, it also helps lower the barriers to entry for 6G research, a major milestone that strengthens China's leadership in next-generation communication technology.

According to Wang Peng, advancing industries of the future represents a forward-looking strategy for China to balance dynamics in China-U.S. relations while contributing to global economic stability through technological self-reliance and open cooperation. The positive outcomes of the meeting between Xi and U.S. President Donald Trump in Busan, the ROK, on October 30 have created new momentum for pragmatic collaboration, injecting vitality into efforts to expand shared interests and generate mutually beneficial opportunities.

During their meeting, Xi said China-U.S. economic and trade relations have experienced ups and downs recently, and this has also given the two sides some insights. He stressed that the business relationship should continue to serve as the anchor and driving force for China-U.S. relations, not a stumbling block or a point of friction.

The two sides should think big and recognize the long-term benefit of cooperation, and must not fall into a vicious cycle of mutual retaliation, Xi added.

"Following the meeting, both sides are likely to deepen cooperation in sectors including energy and digital trade, for instance, through joint investment in hydrogen energy projects, moving beyond zero-sum thinking and creating incremental value for the global economy," Wang Peng said. **BR**

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COVER STORY

A MICROCOSM OF OPENNESS

Import expo provides gateway for China to share opportunities with the world

By Li Xiaoyang

Debuting at the Eighth China International Import Expo (CIIE), held in Shanghai from November 5 to 10, Germany's SUPER POP functional soda, a drink co-developed by the popular fitness influencer Pamela Reif, gained great attention with its zero-sugar ingredients. After going viral on lifestyle sharing app Instagram, this year, the brand took the CIIE as a platform to explore the Chinese market.

The CIIE is the world's first national-level import-themed expo. The expo is a major policy for China to push for a new round of high-standard opening up, and a major measure for China to take the initiative to open its market to the world, President Xi Jinping said when delivering a keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the First CIIE in 2018.

Since its inception, the CIIE has been a gateway for foreign companies to tap into opportunities in the Chinese market. This year's CIIE featured the largest exhibition space in its history and brought together a record 4,108 enterprises from 138 countries and regions. U.S. companies ranked first in terms of exhibition space for seven consecutive years.

Enterprises from 123 Belt and Road partner countries participated in the event, up 23.1 percent from 2024. The China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative works to boost connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes.

Participating companies from the least developed countries totaled 163, a 23.5-percent year-on-year increase. The number of African enterprises present was 80 percent higher than last year.

The expo saw the debut of 461 new products, technologies and services. It also introduced new themes such as the pet economy, ice and snow economy, and digital consumption this year.

Anastasia Nesvetailova, Director of the Macroeconomic and Development Policies Branch of United Nations Trade and Development, told *Beijing Review* that the CIIE was a success despite the current context of a fracture in multilateralism. "What I have seen here is constructive dialogue, effective action and preserving multilateralism," she said.

Strong partnership

Many U.S. firms introduced new products at this year's expo. With its golden streamlined body and unique design without steering wheel and pedals, the Tesla Cybercab, introduced by U.S. electric car maker Tesla at the expo, was a must-see for many visitors.

According to the company, the Cybercab employs Tesla Vision, an

COURTESY PHOTO

A visitor tries on exoskeleton robotic devices of Shanghai-based robot company ULS Robotics at the Eighth China International Import Expo (CIIE) in Shanghai on November 5

WEI YAO

The National Exhibition and Convention Center, the main venue for the Eighth CIIE, on November 4

autonomous driving solution based on a visual processing system, allowing unmanned driving without components like laser radars. The golden exterior comes from the natural color of the metal body, enhancing environmental sustainability. The Cybercab also features wireless charging technology and automated robotic arms for cleaning.

Mass production of the Cybercab is scheduled to begin in the second quarter of 2026, Tesla said, noting that it will be used in the company's Robotaxi unmanned ride hailing service.

Tesla also showcased its two robots at the expo. The company is launching a humanoid robot production line, which will begin production at the end of 2026 and achieve an annual output of 1 million units by 2030. According to Tesla, it will release the third generation of humanoid robots in the first quarter of 2026.

In February this year, after having operated in the Chinese market for 11 years, Tesla began operation of its energy storage plant in Shanghai, its first energy storage gigafactory outside the United States.

The factory produces the company's Megapack, which is an advanced battery system designed for large-scale energy projects that can store more than 3,900 kilowatt-hours of electricity in a single unit. Up to 10,000 Megapack units are scheduled to be produced at the Shanghai factory annually.

In Tesla's vehicle gigafactory in Shanghai, over 95 percent the components are locally produced. The rate of automated production has exceeded 95 percent, with a vehicle rolling off the production line in around 30 seconds.

In the third quarter of this year, Tesla sold nearly 170,000 vehicles in China, up 31 percent year on year from the previous quarter. The vehicles produced in the Shanghai gigafactory also saw record-high sales in Asia-Pacific markets, the company said.

U.S.-based global diversified technology company 3M has participated in the CIIE for eight consecutive years. It showcased various innovative products and material application solutions for infusing green energy into multiple industries through its materials science.

The CIIE serves as a vital platform for 3M to demonstrate its innovative achievements and ▸▸

strengthen local collaborations. Over its past years of participation, the company has consistently aligned with the Chinese market, integrating technologies with local needs to support sustainable industry development, Henry Ding, President of 3M China, told *Beijing Review*, noting that CIIE has helped foreign companies, including 3M, explore the investment opportunities within the Chinese market.

According to Ding, at this year's expo, 3M exhibited multi-scenario innovative solutions that span from industrial manufacturing to daily consumption. It showcased its tape products for transportation, construction and general industry, as well as home appliances, welding helmets and water repellent material for outdoor apparel and gear.

Its products for the automotive industry, including solutions specifically designed for batteries of electric and hybrid vehicles, and car glass cleaner, were also put on display.

3M signed a strategic cooperation memorandum to explore green technology with U.S. chemical producer Dow at this year's CIIE, leveraging the event's role as a meeting point for top global companies.

In China, for China

As a global player in fermentation, France-based Lesaffre Group was another eighth-time participant in the CIIE this year. Jérôme Vanachter, President of Lesaffre Greater China, said during the CIIE that over the past editions, the company has witnessed the expansion of the Chinese market and will continue to explore it in the future.

Today, Lesaffre operates six manufacturing sites in China, along with four major baking centers in the country. The company has also developed its baking center in Shanghai into its first industrialized hub in the Asia-Pacific region, in order to serve its Chinese partners and improve the sustainability of its products.

German specialty chemicals company Evonik Industries AG also debuted several new products at the expo. According to Evonik, it has been exploring cooperation with Chinese companies including the sportswear brand 361 Degrees and multiple makeup brands, using its new material products.

Evonik has introduced a lightweight, high-elasticity nylon foam material for sports shoes. The material, made from recycled raw materials, helps reduce carbon emissions by 70 percent compared to conventional practices.

The company has also launched green biogas separation technologies, enabling high efficiency production of clean energy, which has been deployed in over 70 projects across China. In Jiangsu Province, the technology assists in processing 300,000 tons of manure in rural areas annually, therefore generating 8.76 million cubic meters of biogas.

Going global

Shanghai-based Chinese robotics company ULS Robotics showcased its star products at this year's expo. Its exoskeleton robotic devices with hip joint and a motor system on legs allow wearers to feel more at ease when running. Its FIT-HV PRO waist exoskeleton robotic device allows wearers to effortlessly lift a 25-kg water bag. Weighing only 5.6 kg, this device provides up to 30 kg of assistance to human arms, reducing labor strain and improving efficiency.

Established in Shanghai in 2018, ULS Robotics has participated in the expo for three consecutive years. With five sales centers across five cities in China, its products have been applied in fields including auto manufacturing, firefighting, mining and electricity production.

"ULS Robotics aims to use this year's expo as a platform to promote its exoskeleton robots and solutions to the global market," Zhang Hua, co-founder of ULS Robotics, told *Beijing Review*. ULS Robotics has exported its products to 25 countries and regions, including Germany, Canada and Malaysia.

Its exoskeleton products have also transitioned from being limited to use in industry to use in daily scenarios, allowing it to address practical needs for the elderly or disabled groups, Zhang said.

Chinese collectibles retailer Pop Mart, with its star product Labubu going viral around the world, built a dreamy world at this year's expo. The 600-square-meter wonderland featured a 5-meter-tall Twinkle Twinkle statue, themed photo booths and 11 brand-new character designs.

The China International Import Expo (CIIE) Through The Years

The 2018-24 Editions of the CIIE

Over **$500 bln** in cumulative intended transaction value

Over **3,000** new products, technologies and services made their global or the Chinese mainland debut

(Sources: *CIIE Bureau, Ministry of Commerce*)

COURTESY PHOTO

The booth of U.S. electric car maker Tesla at the Eighth CIIE on November 4

WEI YAO

Exhibitors from Ecuador at the Food and Agricultural Products Exhibition Area of the Eighth CIIE on November 5

Pop Mart first attended the CIIE last year. According to the company, it has introduced a Labubu global series to resonate with consumers overseas. In 2024, the company's revenue in North America and Southeast Asia totaled over 700 million yuan ($98 million) and 2.4 billion yuan ($336 million), respectively, surging around 500 percent and 600 percent year on year.

Once again, the expo highlighted China's push for opening up and its role as a champion of global trade. "China is now the heart of the world manufacturing sector. What's changing is the nature of that production, which is moving up on the industrial chains," Richard Baldwin, a professor of international economics at the IMD Business School in Lausanne, Switzerland, told *Beijing Review*.

Many Chinese companies are going global, which is an absolutely critical element of the world economy. While there are a lot of tensions in the world, China could be part of the solution to keeping the waters calm and allowing international business to continue, Baldwin said.

In his keynote speech at the opening ceremony of this year's expo on November 5, Premier Li Qiang said that with a record high number of participating enterprises, this year's CIIE demonstrated the vitality of China's super-large market.

The document of recommendations for formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), adopted at the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee, convened in Beijing from October 20 to 23, has injected greater certainty into China's economic and social development for the period ahead, Li stressed.

He added that China will unswervingly promote high-standard opening up, steadily expand institutional opening up and advance comprehensive pilot programs to accelerate the opening up of the services industry.

A more modernized China will surely bring more stability and positive energy to the world, Li said. **BR**

(*Ma Xiaowen and Wang Ruohan, reporting from Shanghai, also contributed to this article*)

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THROUGH THEIR EYES

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New Voices, New Order: The Global South's Ascent

By Daniel Filmus

We envision a world of peace, cooperation and integration. However, this vision faces growing threats as right-wing movements around the world incite discrimination, promote division and view the world through the lens of deep inequality.

In the economic field, wealth has become increasingly concentrated. In some cases, this concentration is not within national governments, but rather in multinational corporations whose power surpasses that of many states. This presents a major challenge for the Global South: to democratize not only political governance but also economic governance. Without economic sovereignty, true political independence is impossible.

Moreover, the digital divide remains stark. New information, communication and digital technologies have widened the gap between the Global North and South, while also deepening inequality within countries.

What the Global South truly aspires to is a new international order—one that is fairer and more equitable. The Global South seeks deeper cooperation and integration, using new technologies to help those still suffering from inequality and poverty become an actual part of the development narrative.

Argentina is a major agricultural and livestock producer, and China is one of its largest markets for such exports. Together, we have formed a powerful partnership.

We have also signed agreements in other areas, including biotechnology—particularly genomics applied to agriculture and livestock—and the use of digital technologies in these sectors to help lift more people out of poverty.

China has set an inspiring example in this

regard, having lifted more than 770 million people out of extreme poverty over the course of 40-plus years as of late 2020.

We have also signed cooperation agreements with China in the space sector, carrying out joint research projects.

We are studying China's development experience closely, given it is of great importance to us.

The Global South holds great expectations for the Global Governance Initiative (GGI), which was proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization Plus" Meeting in Tianjin, a port city in north China, on September 1. (The GGI calls on countries to work in concert for a more just and equitable global governance system—*Ed.*)

Xi stressed the five principles of the GGI: Adhering to sovereign equality, abiding by international rule of law, practicing multilateralism, advocating the people-centered approach and focusing on real results. I believe these principles are all highly relevant.

We need a world that respects sovereign equality. In the United Nations General Assembly, the fundamental principle is "one country, one vote." Regardless of a nation's size, wealth or population, each country has its own identity and the right to exist with respect for its people. In this sense, the emphasis on respecting national sovereignty is crucial—without it, nothing else can stand.

The situation where some Global South countries are forced to obey unfair rules simply because they lack power or weapons, while others act freely because they do possess them, should no longer exist. This is why abiding by international rule of law is essential.

Moreover, it's our shared aspiration that we transition into a multipolar world where nations form partnerships based on their interests and complementarities. We strongly agree with Xi's call to practice true multilateralism.

Another central idea Xi has proposed is advocating the people-centered approach. Any form of cooperation between nations must aim to improve people's lives—otherwise, it holds no meaning for us. If our actions do not improve living conditions, what purpose do they possibly serve?

The Global South will undoubtedly become the most dynamic force in advancing these goals by focusing on real results. In many areas, we can make mutual contributions—and that should be the driving force of our cooperation. **BR**

The author is a former minister of science, technology and innovation of Argentina
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From Ambition to Action

By Lan Xinzhen

The 30th UN Climate Change Conference takes place in Belém, Brazil, from November 10 to 21. This year is the 10th anniversary of the milestone Paris Agreement, as well as the deadline for all countries to submit their updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), making the conference a crucial juncture in addressing global climate change. The Paris Agreement, a pact reached by nearly 200 nations in 2015, aims to keep the rise in global average temperature well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and, if possible, below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

In a video address to the UN Climate Summit on September 24, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced China's new round of NDCs: China will, by 2035, reduce economy-wide net greenhouse gas emissions by 7-10 percent from peak levels, striving to do better; increase the share of non-fossil fuels in total energy consumption to over 30 percent; expand the installed capacity of wind and solar power to over six times the 2020 levels, bringing the total to 3,600 gigawatts; scale up the total forest stock volume to over 24 billion cubic meters; make new-energy vehicles the mainstream in the sales of new vehicles; expand the National Carbon Emissions Trading Market to cover major high-emission sectors; and largely establish a climate adaptive society.

Compared with past targets China submitted in 2015 and 2020, this new round of NDCs include for the first time greenhouse gases across all economic sectors, indicating that China's climate governance has moved beyond carbon emission control and shifted to the broader field of sustainable development.

Climate change is one of the most severe challenges facing humanity today, and actively responding to it is a global consensus. China has made significant contributions

to addressing climate change. In 2005, Xi proposed the idea that "green is gold." Over the past 20 years, it has become a consensus of the entire Chinese society. China's energy consumption per unit of GDP dropped 11.6 percent between 2020 and 2024, equivalent to a reduction of 1.1 billion tons of carbon dioxide emissions, making it one of the countries with the fastest decline in energy intensity in the world.

China's energy consumption per unit of GDP dropped 11.6 percent between 2020 and 2024, equivalent to a reduction of 1.1 billion tons of carbon dioxide emissions

Increasing the share of non-fossil fuels in total energy consumption to over 30 percent by 2035 is a key goal in China's new round of NDCs. In 2024, the share of non-fossil fuels in the country's total energy consumption was 19.8 percent, and this figure needs to increase by at least 10 percentage points in the next 10 years. This commitment indicates that China will make significant progress in the installed capacity of clean energy in the future. A total forest stock volume of over 24 billion cubic meters by 2035 may be the most achievable of the targets. In 2024, China's forest coverage rate exceeded 25 percent, and the forest stock volume was over 20 billion cubic meters. The country's National Carbon Emissions Trading Market, launched in 2021, aims to control and reduce greenhouse gas emissions through market mechanisms and is already the world's largest. In 2025, China officially extended the market for the first time to include the cement, steel and aluminum industries instead of merely covering the coal-fired power generation industry. In the future, the carbon trading market will be further expanded to cover other major high-emission industries.

While independently addressing global climate change, China has intensified cooperation with the international community, actively participating in global climate governance and promoting the signing and implementation of the Paris Agreement. Through South-South cooperation on climate change, China has provided financial, technological and capacity-building support to other developing countries. **BR**

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A Region at Its Best

With this year being the 70th anniversary of the founding of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, the State Council Information Office in September released a white paper—CPC (Communist Party of China) Guidelines for Governing Xinjiang in the New Era: Practice and Achievements. It introduces the core principles and successful practices of the CPC's governance of Xinjiang as well as associated data related to the region's development. In a recent interview with *Beijing Review,* **Liang Yuchun**, a professor at the Xinjiang Normal University College of Marxism and Dean of the university's Institute for Advanced Study of Ethnicity and Society, shared his views on the highlights of the white paper and the reason why today's Xinjiang is experiencing the best period of development in its history. Edited excerpts of the interview follow:

***Beijing Review*: Given the concerns of some members of the international community, what key data and facts in the white paper demonstrate that the rights of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang have been fully safeguarded?**

Liang Yuchun: Due to a lack of understanding or being misled, some people in the international community have misconceptions regarding Xinjiang's ethnic policies. The white paper demonstrates with detailed data and facts that the political, economic, social, cultural, environmental and other rights of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang have been fully safeguarded.

From the perspective of political rights protection, Xinjiang has achieved remarkable results in advancing whole-process people's democracy, particularly consultative democracy.

According to the white paper, in 2024, 74,412 people were serving as deputies to people's congresses at all levels in Xinjiang. Of them, 78.69 percent were from the grassroots, and 69.21 percent were from ethnic minority groups. In the same year, Xinjiang had 16,121 members serving on the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference committees at all levels. Of them 49.06 percent were not members of the CPC and 46.13 percent were from ethnic minority groups.

The system of community-level self-governance has been established for all villages and communities across Xinjiang. Over 85 percent of the matters decided on by grassroots self-governance organizations come from public proposals.

From the perspective of safeguarding economic rights, Xinjiang has maximized efforts to ensure voluntary employment and decent working conditions for people of all ethnic groups. The white paper states that employment rates are continuing to improve, with the region's employed population rising from 12.46 million in 2012 to 13.91 million in 2024, up 11.64 percent.

People's income has increased. In 2024, the per-capita disposable income of urban and rural residents reached 42,820 yuan ($6,018) and 19,427 yuan ($2,730), an increase of 23,801 yuan ($3,345) and 12,551 yuan ($1,764), respectively, compared with 2012 figures.

From the perspective of cultural rights protection, Xinjiang has vigorously promoted the prosperity and development of diverse ethnic cultures, creating a vibrant and mutually enriching cultural landscape.

By 2024, Xinjiang had 9,545 verified and registered immovable cultural relics, among which six were world cultural heritage sites. The region also has three UNESCO-recognized intangible cultural heritage items, and 141 items on the national representative list of intangible cultural heritage.

All ethnic groups enjoy the rights to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, and to preserve and protect the fine traditional cultures of their own groups. A local literary award, the Tianshan Literature Award, has been launched, and many Xinjiang-themed literary works have received nationwide acclaim.

Public cultural services have been improved. By the end of 2024, Xinjiang had established 111 public libraries, 118 cultural centers and 1,126 cultural facilities in towns, townships and subdistricts.

From the perspective of social rights protection, Xinjiang has improved people's wellbeing, with strong achievements in poverty eradication. By the end of 2020, all of Xinjiang's more than 3 million impoverished people in rural areas had emerged from poverty.

The education sector has undergone all-round development, with the gross enrollment rate of preschool education, the completion rate of the nine-year compulsory education and the gross enrollment rate of senior high schools all being above the national average in 2024. The structure of higher education has been optimized, and the scale of vocational education has been further expanded.

In the health sector, by 2024, Xinjiang had over 19,000 medical institutions and the development of the health sector has resulted in measurable improvements in people's health, with the average life expectancy in the region increasing from 30 years in 1949 to 77 years in 2024.

By the end of 2024, the number of people

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Delegates attend a grand gathering in celebration of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region's 70th anniversary in Urumqi on September 25

in the basic old-age pension scheme and the basic medical insurance system stood at 16.91 million and 23.67 million respectively, each accounting for over 95 percent of Xinjiang's total population.

Xinjiang has also made progress in environmental protection and improvement. The forest coverage rate increased from 4.24 percent in 2012 to 5.07 percent in 2024. The total area of oases has expanded by 56.6 percent over the past three decades. The battle against desertification on the fringes of the Taklimakan Desert has been successful, with the desert now entirely encircled with a sand-blocking green belt stretching 3,046 km, the longest in the world.

China has proposed the Belt and Road Initiative to boost connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes. The initiative consists of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road. As a core area of the Silk Road Economic Belt, what are Xinjiang's achievements in the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative? What are the new plans for enhancing connectivity with Central Asia, Europe and other regions in the future?

Xinjiang aims to build a golden channel across the Eurasian continent and a gateway for opening up to the west. It has made many achievements in advancing the Belt and Road Initiative.

It has established 19 ports. A total of 16,400 freight trains traveled through Xinjiang on the China-Europe Railway Express in 2024. The number of Xinjiang's international economic and trade partners also increased to 211 in 2024. Trade volume has expanded, with the total import and export value surging from 158.96 billion yuan ($22.34 billion) in 2012 to 434.16 billion yuan ($61.02 billion) in 2024.

The China (Xinjiang) Pilot Free Trade Zone was approved and established in October 2023. Over the following year, more than 9,000 enterprises moved into the zone.

In the future, Xinjiang will accelerate high-level opening up by deepening connectivity with Central Asia, Europe and other regions. Efforts will focus on building Urumqi into a regional international commercial and logistics hub, an international inbound goods distribution center and a comprehensive international aviation hub serving Central and West Asia. More China-Europe railway services and flight routes through Central Asia will be launched.

In 2024, over 500 foreign delegations visited Xinjiang. What role has this "seeing is believing" approach played in changing external perceptions of Xinjiang?

International coverage of Xinjiang has been mixed. Some reports stick to the facts, capturing the region's genuine progress, social harmony, its growing economy and the improving lives of its residents. Too often, however, the narrative is clouded by ideological bias, presenting a distorted picture that misleads global audiences.

To set the record straight, Xinjiang has been becoming more open to the world. Foreign visitors—from diplomats and journalists to academics—are seeing the region for themselves. They encounter a modern, developing and peaceful place, a reality that directly challenges the grim portrayals in some media. These first-hand experiences are crucial for breaking down the "information bubble" and allowing a more complete story to emerge. We're seeing more balanced international reporting on Xinjiang, and its reputation as a compelling destination is growing.

Boosting tourism through international marketing programs and more direct flights would bring in more visitors. Furthermore, expanding international student enrollment at local universities and hosting more international sporting events would provide more outsiders with a direct, unfiltered experience of the region. The most powerful rebuttal to misinformation is simply letting people see Xinjiang for themselves. When they do, the vision of a beautiful Xinjiang will stand on its own. **BR**

Scan the QR code to listen to a podcast based on the interview

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Popular Support

By Zhang Juan

American attitudes toward China are undergoing a remarkable change. According to results from the 2025 Chicago Council Survey, released by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CCGA) in October, most Americans now support cooperative relations with China—a clear break from the "great power competition" framework that has dominated U.S. foreign policy in recent years.

For years, U.S. foreign policy toward China—under both the Donald Trump and Joe Biden administrations—has focused on competition, containment and economic decoupling. The survey finds that 53 percent of Americans now say the U.S. should adopt a policy of cooperation and engagement with China, up significantly from 40 percent in 2024.

The change is largely driven by Democrats and Independents. Two thirds of Democrats (66 percent) now favor cooperation over containment, a 19-point increase from 2024. By contrast, only 33 percent of Republicans agree.

The survey shows a declining threat perception on China. The number of Americans viewing China's rise as a "critical threat" has declined to 50 percent (down from 58 percent in 2023). This is largely due to Democrats and Independents prioritizing domestic issues—such as threats to U.S. democracy and government corruption—over international security challenges.

Public opinion on trade with China has also become more positive. Americans are now evenly split on whether trade strengthens or weakens national security (48 percent vs. 47 percent), a notable reversal from 2021.

When it comes to military strength, Americans remain confident, with 53 percent saying the U.S. is stronger than China. However, views on economic strength are split, with roughly one third seeing the U.S. as stronger (34 percent), a third seeing China as stronger (33 percent) and one third seeing them as equal (31 percent).

Most Americans now support cooperative relations with China—a clear break from the "great power competition" framework that has dominated U.S. foreign policy in recent years

While Americans broadly support engagement, they remain firmly committed to two pillars of U.S. policy. Across party lines, they agree on two top goals: avoiding a military conflict with China (62 percent) and maintaining the U.S. edge in high technology (58 percent).

"This shift in public attitudes may disquiet some Democrats in Congress, especially those who have focused on competition with China as a key part of their political agenda, and may boost support for those who have argued for a more diplomacy-forward approach to Beijing," Craig Kafura, Director of public opinion and foreign policy at the CCGA wrote in an introduction to the survey on the council's website.

Founded in 1922, the CCGA is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that promotes public understanding and engagement in global issues. The 2025 Chicago Council Survey, conducted online by market research company Ipsos from July 18-30 among 2,148 U.S. adults nationwide, included respondents from all 50 states and Washington, D.C. The survey, offered in English and Spanish, has a margin of error of ±2.2 percentage points.

The Chicago Council Survey is not alone in showing a trend of decreasing public antipathy toward China. A July Pew Research Center survey of 24 countries shows that China's international image is improving, while views of the U.S. have deteriorated. Across the countries surveyed, views of China and the U.S. are now closer.

Survey results like these carry important implications for analysts across U.S.-China policy areas. Those focusing on U.S.-China competition must now contend with a more complex domestic audience: The public is no longer uniformly in favor of confrontation.

More importantly, the survey presents a challenging picture for policymakers. Ignoring these shifts risks eroding public support for an otherwise hard-liner China policy. Policymakers now face the difficult task of balancing this evolving sentiment—working with China on shared global challenges such as climate change and public health, while safeguarding U.S. interests and maintaining leverage. This is a question that demands thoughtful consideration and strategic planning. **BR**

Zhang Juan is an editor at U.S.-China Perception Monitor, an online platform for in-depth news analysis and commentary, founded by the China Focus program of the Carter Center, a nonprofit organization based in Atlanta, Georgia
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Hong Kong as a Model for Pluriversal Coexistence

By Conrad Ho

We, as a global community, are learning to move beyond a legacy where a single worldview has long dominated. To resolve conflicts, we must return to the universal first principles of dignity, respect and coexistence. The way forward is to build frameworks that are rooted in universal rights while also being considerate of local values and traditions, allowing diverse systems to truly harmonize.

Imagine human rights not as a single melody, but as a symphony of dignity. Each culture is a unique instrument. The goal is not for one to dominate, but to create a symphony where all can harmonize. The conductor's role—a role for bodies like the United Nations—is not to dictate every note, but to ensure mutual respect and a shared rhythm.

This idea finds resonance across cultures, including in the Chinese concept of "harmony in difference." In Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), the One Country, Two Systems principle embodies this. (One Country, Two Systems means there is only but one China and under this premise the mainland adheres to the socialist system while Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan may retain their capitalist systems over a long time to come—*Ed.*)

It is not just an abstract philosophy, but something we live and breathe every day. It is codified in our Basic Law, our constitutional document; it is the small business owner who sources products from the mainland while relying on Hong Kong's independent judiciary; it is the student who studies a global curriculum but returns home to a family shaped by traditional Chinese values.

This principle also drives tangible results. First, on how diversity fuels our economy. Our push for inclusive corporate governance, such as the Hong Kong Stock Exchange's 2025 requirement for all listed companies to have at least one director of a different gender, helps build a more robust and resilient economy. This fosters a greater variety of perspectives, reduces cognitive biases and enhances connectivity. This commitment is a key reason why, according to the latest financial data, Hong Kong has once again topped the global rankings for initial public offering fundraising, having raised nearly HK$150 billion ($19 billion) as of late August—a figure nearly six times higher than the same period last year.

Second, on how we create an enabling environment to nurture world-class talent. A combination of government talent admission schemes and NGO-led initiatives to solve localized problems has created a lively ecosystem.

However, this economic and social vitality rests upon a fundamental foundation: a robust legal framework that guarantees stability. Ensuring a baseline of societal stability is the essential precondition for diversity, talent and true pluriversal coexistence. Our experience in Hong Kong has taught us that legislation, including the National Security Law and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, provide this foundation, creating the predictable and secure environment for a true plurality of voices to flourish.

This stability allows not just for economic prosperity but for the preservation and evolution of core cultural values—like the Confucian principle of filial piety, which continues to shape our family structures and social responsibilities. It enables Hong Kong to be that unique synthesis: an international metropolis where people of diverse backgrounds live, work and thrive together, all while traditional values inform a modern, pluralistic society.

The success of this approach is confirmed by the Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of the World Report, which ranked Hong Kong as the world's freest economy in 2025, and top in "freedom to trade internationally." This demonstrates that stability and freedom are not opposites, but two sides of the same coin—the very coin that purchases the space for pluriversal coexistence.

To conclude, coexistence is not about one system erasing another. It is about weaving different realities into a single, strong social fabric. From Hong Kong, we have learned that this symphony, while challenging, is possible. It requires listening, patience and the conviction that our harmonious chorus is infinitely more powerful—and more beautiful—than any solo. Hong Kong's journey is a living musical score for this vital global dialogue. **BR**

The author is executive vice president of the Y.Elites Association, an organization established in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in 2007 to further youth development. The article is edited based on his speech at a side event of the 60th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC60) on Human Rights and Pluriversalism on September 30

Copyedited by Elsbeth van Paridon

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War on Multipolarism Includes Latin America

By Brian Berletic

As the U.S. continues its proxy war with Russia in Ukraine and its escalation with China in the Asia-Pacific, the U.S. is also targeting a number of nations not only across Eurasia, but also far beyond it, including the Latin American nation of Venezuela.

The purpose of targeting Venezuela—officially—is to stop the flood of illicit narcotics into the U.S., which Venezuela's government is accused of facilitating. In reality, this is a fabricated pretext meant to manufacture consent for yet another war of aggression—one designed to contribute to a wider geopolitical objective of confronting and rolling back multipolarism.

The U.S., since the end of the Cold War, has pursued a U.S.-dominated unipolar world order in which all matters are determined by and for the U.S. Part of achieving this is preventing any one single nation or group of nations from challenging America's global primacy.

In recent years these efforts have focused on preventing the reemergence of Russia and the rise of China. It also has focused on preventing nations outside U.S. domination from aligning with either or both. The U.S. achieves this through influence, coercion, political capture—and failing that, proxy war, then actual war.

Continuity across administrations

Venezuela has been targeted by the U.S. for regime change throughout the 21st century. The George W. Bush administration very briefly ousted the government of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in 2002. Since then, regardless of who occupies the White House or controls U.S. Congress, U.S.-funded political interference, sanctions and covert military operations have continued placing pressure on Venezuela in hopes of removing the current political order from power and replacing it with a U.S. client regime.

While headlines focus on U.S. President Donald Trump's obsession with regime change in Venezuela spanning his two terms in office, it should be noted that sanctions and political interference targeting the nation continued from the Bush administration, throughout the eight years of the Barak Obama administration and also under the Joe Biden administration.

Despite attempts by the Trump administration to deny involvement in the 2020 failed overthrow of the Venezuelan Government, it fits in with both a historical pattern of U.S. interference worldwide, and other covert operations carried out under the Trump administration.

Regardless, the U.S. now openly seeks to overthrow the Venezuelan Government and has been assembling significant military forces to do so off Venezuela's coasts, including U.S. Navy and Marine Corps vessels, warplanes and troops.

Should the decision be made to launch a military operation, it will likely take the form of similar decapitation strikes the U.S. and its Israeli proxies have conducted against Hezbollah in Lebanon last year and against the Iranian Government earlier this year together with strikes aimed at crippling civilian infrastructure and damaging Venezuela's economy even further than years of U.S. sanctions already have.

Manufacturing consent

While Trump campaigned for office on a platform of ending "endless wars," since taking office, he has continued each war inherited from the previous Biden administration while launching and preparing to launch several new conflicts.

To justify a war of aggression against Venezuela aimed at regime change, President Trump has shifted narratives previously based on fighting Venezuela's "corruption" and "dictatorship," to blaming America's multidecade drug crisis suddenly and squarely on Venezuela.

The administration has claimed President Trump is acting to "protect our country from those trying to bring deadly poison to our shores" at the same time the Trump administration also claims to have already "secured" America's borders within its first 100 days in office.

According to the White House official website, "Since President Donald J. Trump took office, he and his administration have ushered in the most secure border in modern American history—and he didn't need legislation to do it. President Trump has made good on the promises he made on the campaign trail to usher in an unprecedented era of homeland security."

And yet, according to the same administration, Venezuela is single-handedly circumventing this "unprecedented era of homeland security" to "poison" millions of Americans with illicit narcotics—so much so that it warrants a war of aggression launched against Venezuela itself.

Part of the theatrics in selling this latest war of aggression includes the U.S. targeting

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Members of the Bolivar militia participated in a national special military exercise in Bolivar Square in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, on October 4

boats allegedly trafficking illicit narcotics to the U.S. from Venezuela, despite the boats being targeted not having the physical ability to make the more than 1,000-mile (1,700 km) trip. While some seem to assume the U.S. had actionable information before carrying out the strikes, it should be pointed out that similar warfare throughout the 20-plus years of the "war on terror" resulted in mainly civilian casualties.

In a 2021 *Washington Post* article, it was reported that Daniel Hale, a former member of the U.S. armed forces, leaked "classified information about drone warfare to a reporter after leaving the military."

The leaked information revealed, "During one five-month stretch of an operation in Afghanistan, the documents revealed, nearly 90 percent of the people killed were not the intended targets."

The same vague pretext and lack of transparency that resulted in staggering civilian casualties throughout the "war on terror" now continues amid the Trump administration's "war on drugs."

Launching a war of aggression based on false pretexts has defined U.S. foreign policy throughout the 21st century—most notably ahead of the U.S. occupation of Iraq in 2003.

In a 2011 article, *The Guardian* published admissions the supposed justification for the invasion was based on deliberate fabrications, writing: "the defector who convinced the White House that Iraq had a secret biological weapons programme has admitted for the first time that he lied about his story, then watched in shock as it was used to justify the war."

While the article attempts to portray the U.S. establishment as "tricked" into war with Iraq, it is clear that war with Iraq—just like now with Venezuela—was already a foregone conclusion and the U.S. establishment simply worked its way backward to create a narrative to convince Americans and the world to go along.

Under the current Trump administration, the very worst of past U.S. conflicts is converging once again ahead of yet another unnecessary war of aggression, once again built on a transparently false pretext and waged by the Trump administration through the same indiscriminate brutality many Americans voted President Trump into office to end.

While some analysts have mistakenly concluded U.S. escalation toward Venezuela represents a "retreat" from Asia or even Eurasia, and a transition from pursuing global primacy toward carving out an American "sphere of influence," the U.S. is much more likely attempting to complement its continued encirclement, containment and confrontation with both Russia and China by eliminating one of their more vulnerable allies—Venezuela—in a bid to escalate rather than withdraw from Washington's ongoing war against multipolarism. **BR**

The author is a Bangkok-based independent geopolitical analyst and a former U.S. Marine
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Why Is India Losing Its Appeal to Foreign Investors?

By Xu Qin

According to data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), India's net foreign direct investment (FDI) turned negative in August, recording an outflow of $616 million.

Net FDI refers to the gross inflows into India minus the funds remitted abroad by foreign companies through repatriation or disinvestment, as well as Indian companies' outward investments.

The rare decline reveals a sobering reality behind the glittering labels of "the world's fastest-growing economy," "the most populous nation" and "India's Gilded Age"—that capital is quietly flowing out of the country.

The withdrawal of foreign investment is no accident. In the 2024-25 fiscal year, India's net FDI plunged by more than 96.5 percent to just $353 million compared with $10.1 billion in the previous fiscal year, according to the RBI.

By May 2025, net FDI stood at only $35 million, 98 percent lower than the $2.2 billion recorded in May 2024.

The sharp fall was mainly due to large-scale disinvestment and profit repatriation by foreign companies. The RBI, however, interpreted the trend as a sign of "a maturing market mechanism" and "enhanced liquidity"—an explanation that in effect obscures the deeper problem of waning long-term investor confidence in India and the increasingly short-term nature of foreign capital.

Unmake 'Make in India'

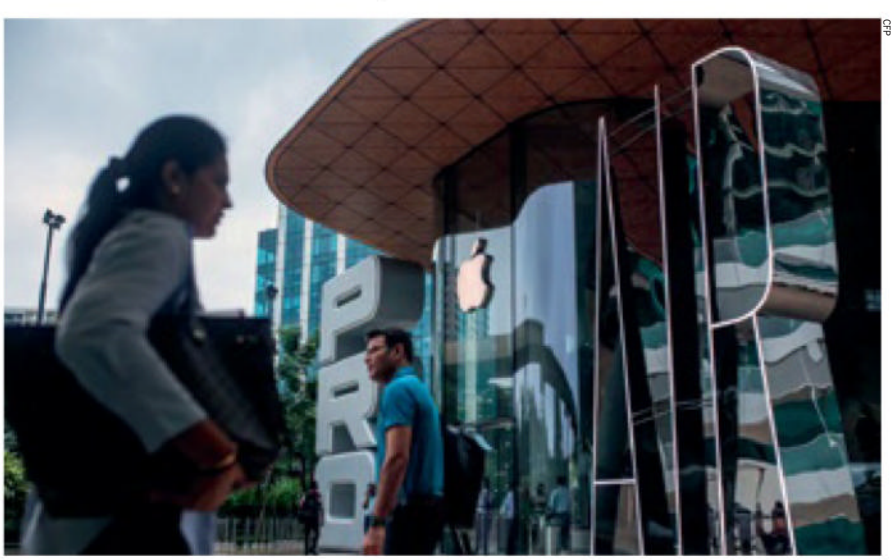
The answer to the downturn perhaps lies in the gap between the grand narrative of "Make in India" and the reality behind it.

Launched on September 25, 2014, the "Make in India" initiative was designed to promote manufacturing, foster innovation and transform India into a global manufacturing hub. The program aimed to boost economic growth by attracting both foreign and domestic investment while improving the ease of doing business.

Over the past decade, the Indian Government has worked to improve the business environment, roll out industrial incentive policies and upgrade infrastructure, hoping to leverage its demographic dividend, market potential and the restructuring of global supply chains to realize its dream of becoming "the world's factory."

Yet 10 years on, that dream remains elusive. The manufacturing sector's share of GDP has not increased but declined, job creation has fallen short of expectations and the problem of foreign investment "coming in but not staying" has become increasingly evident. The root cause lies in the structural barriers embedded in India's economic ecosystem and governance system, which together form deep-seated flaws in its investment environment.

India's legal and regulatory environment remains highly uncertain. While its legislation is sound on paper, violations of law and selective enforcement are common. The legal system is complex and ambiguous, with many business and economic laws carrying potential criminal penalties, greatly increasing compliance costs and operational risks for companies. On the policy side, frequent changes in tariffs, foreign ownership limits and environmental standards, along with differing interpretations between central and local authorities, make it difficult for



CFP

An Apple store in Mumbai, India, on September 19

investors to form stable expectations. More worryingly, selective law enforcement in cases involving foreign enterprises has become increasingly common, with several well-known multinational companies facing regulatory challenges in India. This has undermined the government's credibility and deepened investor concerns over asset security and returns.

Administrative inefficiency and red tape further exacerbate the problem. To set up, operate or expand a business in India, companies must navigate numerous approval procedures and obtain multiple no objection certificates from different departments. The lengthy procedures, potential delays and corruption risks considerably raise both time and compliance costs for foreign investors.

The Indian Government's $23-billion Production Linked Incentive scheme, introduced in 2020 to spur domestic manufacturing through financial incentives and reduce reliance on imports, has faced criticisms for slow approvals and delayed subsidy payments.

According to *The Economic Times*, around 750 companies, including Apple supplier Foxconn and Reliance Industries, joined the scheme, which offered cash incentives tied to specific production goals and timelines. However, many firms struggled to start production, while others that met their targets reported long waits for the promised payouts.

An Indian official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told the newspaper that red tape and bureaucratic caution have continued to stymie the program's effectiveness.

According to the World Bank's 2020 Doing Business Report, India ranked 136th in "Starting a Business." It required 10 separate procedures and around 18 days to complete them—though in practice, the process often takes much longer due to bureaucratic complexity and low administrative efficiency. Exiting the market is equally difficult: Winding up or closing a subsidiary involves lengthy and complicated legal procedures. Between 2014 and 2021, 2,783 foreign companies ceased operations in India. From 2018 to 2022, the number of foreign firms leaving the country even exceeded those entering it—over 550 companies shut down operations, while only about 470 new ones set up business, according to *The Hindu*.

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Computer and accessories shops at an electronics market in New Delhi, India, on July 4

Finally, India faces massive structural constraints in basic production factors, particularly in land acquisition and labor management. Land ownership records are often unclear and disputed, and India's strict land acquisition laws make it extremely difficult to obtain industrial land. The process frequently triggers legal disputes and public protests, which has become one of the major obstacles to manufacturing investment.

On the labor side, India's labor laws impose strict limits and complicated procedures on dismissals, layoffs and factory closures. These rules raise the threshold for labor protection but also deprive enterprises of flexibility in times of economic fluctuation or capacity adjustment, discouraging new fixed assets investment.

In addition, India's infrastructure bottlenecks, including unreliable electricity supply, underdeveloped transport systems and outdated port facilities, further constrain industrial growth. Many foreign companies are forced to install their own power generators or repair access roads, which ends up increasing their operational costs.

Despite its vast demographic dividend and enormous market potential, India's multiple structural barriers and weak business environment continue to limit its attractiveness to foreign investors. In an era of increasingly fierce global competition, unless India can swiftly improve its investment climate and rebuild investor confidence, the ambition of "Make in India" may remain little more than a slogan. **BR**

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A Green Dream About to Crash

By Djoomart Otorbaev

When Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, the EU's executive branch, painted Europe's green transition as a success story on October 22, the reality on the ground told a different story.

The continent's auto industry—once a pillar of European industrial strength—has sounded an unusually loud, unified alarm: The legally binding route to eliminate internal-combustion vehicles by 2035 is "no longer feasible" in today's geopolitical and economic context. That admission, put forward in a letter signed by the presidents of the European Automobile Manufacturer's Association (ACEA) and European Association of Automotive Suppliers (CLEPA), should be treated as a red flag rather than a bureaucratic briefing note.

Three separate, reinforcing failures explain why the 2035 timetable is now at risk: demand economics, infrastructure and grids and industrial supply chains. Each has recent data points that show the scale of the problem.

First, demand is real but shallow. The use of battery electric vehicles (BEVs), which are powered entirely by electricity, is growing but they remain a minority in Europe's new car market. In the first six months of 2025, BEVs accounted for roughly 15-16 percent of registrations across the EU—meaningful growth, but far short of the near-total replacement the 2035 ban implies.

Hybrid technologies still dominate consumers' choice set, and commercial vehicle electrification is much more limited: Vans and trucks show single-digit BEV shares, and commercial BEV penetration remains nascent outside a handful of early-adopter countries. In short, the needle is moving, but not remotely fast enough for an enforced phase-out of traditional vehicles.

Second, infrastructure and electricity systems are not ready. Europe recently passed the milestone of roughly 1 million public electric vehicle (EV) charging points—a headline figure applauded in Brussels—but behind that number lies a brutal shortfall in geographic coverage and raw capacity. Analyses by the ACEA and the International Energy Agency show that current rollout rates would leave the EU millions of chargers short of what is needed by 2030, and installations remain heavily concentrated in a few countries.

Grid congestion, permitting bottlenecks and uneven deployment mean drivers in many member states still face long waits, thin networks and fragile local grids—a practical brake on consumer adoption.

Third, the industrial backbone is fraying. Europe's hope of building a local battery industry suffered a symbolic blow when Northvolt—a Sweden-based manufacturer of lithium-ion batteries for EVs and operator of the championed European gigafactory—announced in March it had filed for bankruptcy and halted operations. That collapse deflated confidence that Europe could scale battery production quickly or cheaply enough to break dependence on Asian suppliers.

At the same time, automotive balance sheets are weakening: Mercedes, Audi, BMW, Volkswagen and Stellantis have reported sharp falls in operating profits—in Stellantis' case, a 2.3-billion-euro ($2.65 billion) first-half loss in 2025. Those are not idiosyncratic setbacks; they are structural hits driven by weak demand, rising production costs and disruptive trade and regulatory pressures.

Policy choices have amplified these stresses. Washington's decision to impose higher tariffs on European auto imports earlier this year and subsequent trade skirmishes have added direct costs and strategic uncertainty for exporters and global supply chains. Stellantis attributed hundreds of millions in charges to tariff impacts.

Meanwhile, the EU's laboratory of regulatory zeal—tight carbon dioxide targets, rising compliance costs and ambitious timelines—is colliding

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A visitor takes photos of a McLaren car on display at the Brussels Auto Show in Brussels, Belgium, on January 17, 2024

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The European Commission building in Brussels, Belgium, on October 4, 2024

with market realities. In other words, Europe is trying to force a capital-intensive industrial transformation at breakneck speed while relying on supply chains and consumers that are not yet aligned with the plan.

Brussels' answer so far has been more of the same: insistence, planning documents and calls for smoother permitting. However, the industry no longer asks for cheerleading. It wants cash, coordinated industrial policy and realistic timelines.

The ACEA and CLEPA letter explicitly asks for "clear and orderly" rules, easier permits and public support to avoid social and industrial dislocation—language that translates, in practice, to subsidies, tax incentives and state-backed energy deals. That request exposes the political fragility behind the rhetoric. Unless the public purse or regulatory burden is retooled, taxpayers and consumers will pay for the transition, not market forces.

There are geopolitical consequences, too. While Brussels insists it delivers on climate promises, China continues to expand its leadership in EV supply chains and downstream manufacturing, and the U.S. is dangling subsidies, market access and tariff leverage. The result: Europe risks exporting strategic industrial capacity even as it imports the environmental benefits and the political capital of being "green." If the continent keeps outsourcing batteries and critical components while maintaining the 2035 deadline, it will have decarbonized more in name than substance—and probably at a higher economic cost.

What would a pragmatic reset look like? First, align mandatory carbon dioxide trajectories with realistic vehicle and infrastructure buildout curves; second, massively accelerate and harmonize charging and grid investments with simpler permitting and EU-level financing; third, deploy a targeted industrial package for batteries and cell manufacturing that reduces dependence on a single region; and fourth, use temporary demand-side supports to avoid a cliff in sales that would hollow out the industry.

These are politically complex steps—but preferable to the alternative: a decade of plant closures, job losses and reputational damage that hollow out Europe's ability to shape the global low-emissions transition.

Von der Leyen's speeches can celebrate intent but industry data and recent bankruptcies reveal execution risk. The EU can still be a climate leader, but only if it stops treating the green transition as a symbolic target and starts treating it as a manufacturing crisis that needs an industrial strategy, not just regulation. Otherwise, the 2035 mandate risks becoming a monument to good intentions and poor planning—costly to voters and lethal for Europe's industrial heartland. **BR**

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Harmony's Harvest

Ancient Chinese wisdom resonates across continents By Tao Zihui

In 2024, China imported 520 million durians. This figure was cited during the 2025 Hehe Culture Forum, held from October 31 to November 2 in Taizhou, Zhejiang Province. Chang Bo, President of China International Communications Group, mentioned the figure in his remarks at the opening ceremony.

What appears to be a routine consumption statistic holds a deeper meaning. "This reflects not only the remarkable resilience of China's economy but, more importantly, demonstrates how China has injected strong stability into global development amid worldwide economic stagnation," Chang said.

The Chinese market has seen a remarkable influx of Southeast Asian fruits under the vibrant China-ASEAN partnership, with the two sides as each other's largest trading partner. This fruitful exchange illustrates the win-win cooperation championed by Hehe Culture.

Hehe is a phrase formed by combining two homophonic Chinese characters, with the first denoting peace and harmony and the second cooperation and unity.

In his address, Chang hailed Hehe Culture as a cornerstone of Chinese civilization, and an ancient philosophy now deeply integrated into China's modern governance.

Hehe wisdom

The Hehe Culture Forum brought together over 150 guests from nearly 20 countries across five continents to explore the global relevance of Hehe Culture.

Zhao Cheng, a senior official from Zhejiang, framed Hehe Culture not as a historical relic but as a momentum for development. He emphasized how the culture's principles of inclusiveness and mutual assistance provide vital guidance for international relations in an increasingly divided world, enabling nations to find common ground while respecting differences.

Today, the promoters of Hehe Culture span the globe. Former UN Under Secretary General Pino Arlacchi, as a Hehe Culture ambassador, expressed his commitment to leveraging Hehe principles to foster international cooperation on peace and sustainable development, noting that this ancient Chinese wisdom offers valuable guidance for human progress.

The contemporary relevance of this ancient wisdom was further emphasized by Li Zhihui, Director of the Overseas Promotion Bureau under the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, who presented Hehe Culture as a timely antidote to zero-sum thinking and a foundation for genuine multilateralism in global governance.

The international dimension of the forum was highlighted by Thun Vathana, Second Vice President of the Senate of Cambodia, who spoke of the deep, centuries-old ties between Cambodia and China. He affirmed that the Hehe principle of "seeking harmony in diversity" offers essential guidance for navigating today's global divisions and building bridges between civilizations.

Former Asian Development Bank Managing Director General Rajat M. Nag was more direct. In his view, the contemporary significance of Hehe Culture lies precisely in its transcendence of either-or binary opposition. This wisdom resonates with the ancient Indian concept of "the world as one family" and the Greek philosophy of cosmopolitanism.

Argentine scholar Martín Unzué, Director of the Gino Germani Institute, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, told *Beijing Review*, "We must consider how humanity can create a better future for all. We all live in the same house—that is our planet."

Penelope Keenan, Senior Policy Advisor for the Culture Sector at UNESCO, said she appreciated the dynamic beauty of Hehe Culture. "The concept of harmony is fascinating because it's not static. It's living, integrated

COURTESY PHOTO

The 2025 Hehe Culture Forum underway in Taizhou, Zhejiang Province, on November 1

XINHUA

Visitors gather at the terrace viewing platform in Beishan Village of Tiantai County in Taizhou to photograph the sunrise on the morning of October 4

and dynamic," she told *Beijing Review*.

Italian sinologist Dario Famularo from Sichuan International Studies University captured the essence of Hehe Culture through the metaphor of white and black horses. "White horses and black horses are both horses first—color differences shouldn't obscure their fundamental commonality," he said.

Nepal-China Social Relations Academy Chairman Balmukunda Regmi further explained: "Hehe Culture doesn't seek to eliminate all differences but pursues unity in diversity. The world contains numerous things, cultures and activities, but ultimately they can point toward the same goal: progressing together, developing together."

Echoes across time

The wisdom of Hehe Culture is deeply rooted in China's intellectual history. Its principles have been drawn from a continuous lineage of thoughts, from Confucius' ideal of "harmony in diversity" to the "integration of heaven and humanity" of Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu. These ideas have been woven into the fabric of Chinese thought and behavior.

A hub of Hehe Culture, Taizhou has been a place of cultural confluence.

Just outside the Guoqing Temple at Tiantai Mountain in Taizhou stands the Hanshi Pavilion, a structure commemorating the monumental friendship between Han Shan, a renowned Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet, and Shi De, an esteemed Buddhist monk. Their deep bond embodied the Hehe ideal of "harmony as the supreme virtue" and they were revered as the incarnation of Hehe Culture, creating a legacy that would resonate through millennia.

Then, during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, tea from Tiantai Mountain began its quiet journey along the Silk Road, subtly inspiring tea traditions in Japan and the Korean Peninsula. This was perhaps one of the earliest chances that Hehe had reached distant shores long before the world spoke of globalization.

Much later, in 1997, the quiet wisdom of this region would find an unexpected voice abroad. American author Charles Frazier opened his celebrated novel *Cold Mountain* with a line from poet Han: "Men ask the way to Cold Mountain. Cold Mountain: There's no through trail." The line ▸▸

XINHUA

Tourists explore Ruyi Bridge in Xianju National Park, Taizhou on October 1

encapsulates the hopeless longing of the novel's hero for a life of happiness. Without naming the philosophy explicitly, the book strikes a profound chord with readers across the ocean, demonstrating the universal appeal of Taizhou's ancient wisdom.

Now, serving as the permanent venue of the five-year-old Hehe Culture Forum, Taizhou continues to promote cultural exchange. As the forum continues to grow, it embodies a continuous practice of pluralism and inclusive development.

Throughout Taizhou's streets and alleys, images of Han Shan and Shi De, the two immortals of harmony, appear everywhere, from ordinary household plates and paper-cuttings to murals and sculptures in public spaces. One immortal holds a lotus flower, the other presents a round box—the lotus (pronounced *he* in Chinese) and box (also *he* in Chinese) form a homophone for Hehe, embodying people's simple yearning for harmonious fulfillment.

Today, Hehe Culture has become tangible governance wisdom, developmental momentum and a way of life for Taizhou—the spiritual code to its enduring vitality.

At the forum, Shen Mingquan, Secretary of the CPC Taizhou Committee, detailed how the Hehe gene informs local initiatives in sustainable economics, ecological preservation and community governance, becoming a tangible driver of the city's progress and quality of life.

In the waxberry forests of Xianju County in Taizhou, people can witness this wisdom in practice. The county's ancient waxberry composite planting system was recognized by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in 2023 as the world's first globally important agricultural heritage system in the waxberry domain. Xianju has developed a composite model where chickens weed and control pests while their manure enriches the soil; bees pollinate to produce honey while also enhancing the quality of the waxberries. Each species finds its place, forming a virtuous organic cycle.

This not only yields superior ecological products but, more importantly, vividly embodies the ancient wisdom of "harmony between heaven and humanity" in Hehe Culture. Here, humans are not nature's exploiters but its guardians and coordinators, thriving together with all beings.

Today, Taizhou is further promoting Hehe Culture while continuously promoting its integration into daily life, providing an answer to the question of how we should coexist with other in an increasingly divided world. **BR**

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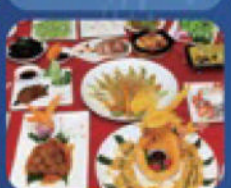

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Scan to watch China Mosaic

Be Part of the Story

China's scenic spots are hiring actors and creating elaborate scenarios to transform traditional tourism By Yuan Yuan

Eight days, seven cities—a whirlwind tour that defined actor Zheng Guolin's work schedule during the National Day holiday a month ago. From October 1 to 8, he maintained a relentless pace, not just logging miles but also switching between roles. One moment, he was a regal emperor commanding the historic grounds of Xi'an, Shaanxi Province in northwest China; the next, a mystical martial artist in a white robe, engaging tourists in friendly martial arts demonstrations in Anji, coastal Zhejiang Province.

Since earlier this year, Zheng has been a frequent presence in non-player character (NPC) performances at scenic spots nationwide. His established recognition from numerous television roles gives him a head start with audiences. In parks, he often plays the classic characters he has portrayed on the screen.

"At first, I did feel embarrassed—being recognized by tourists who said I was a washed-up actor forced to work as an NPC," he told China News Service. But as he immersed himself in the role, his perspective transformed. "I came to understand that being an NPC is fundamentally still acting—it demands the same professional knowledge and dedication, only the stage has changed."

As invitations from tourist destinations multiplied and visitors increasingly sought him out for face-to-face interactions and photographs, Zheng realized his career had entered a new chapter.

Screen to scene

Zheng's experience reflects China's "NPC craze" sweeping across the nation's tourism sector in recent years, attracting visitors to destinations.

"Many traditional tourist attractions now face waning visitor interest, especially among younger generations," Han Yufeng, Marketing Director of the Baidongxia Tourist Area in Yangxin County, Hubei Province in central China, told China News Service. "For numerous scenic spots, the breakthrough lies in fundamentally shifting from passive sightseeing to immersive, interactive experiences where visitors don't just see something but become part of something."

Professional actors possess distinct advantages in this new landscape. Their training in character development, improvisation and audience engagement translates seamlessly to NPC roles.

For actors navigating career transitions, NPC work represents what industry insiders call a "win-win situation." As many performers find suitable parts harder to come by, NPC work at scenic spots allows them to continue applying their hard-won skills while securing a stable income. Tourist destinations inviting actors with established fan bases generate immediate social media buzz and boost visitor numbers in an increasingly competitive market.

The movement extends far beyond leveraging star power. Across China, innovative tourist spots are developing customized live NPC programs aligned with their unique characteristics and local lore.

The Baidongxia Tourism Area, renowned for its spectacular karst landscapes featuring a dramatic canyon connecting numerous caves, recruited over 20 "monster" NPCs during the October holiday. These performers, playing characters from Chinese mythology, interacted with tourists through improvised scenarios, earning daily wages of up to 1,000 yuan ($140).

The "monster" positions were sought after. With no educational requirements and daily pay ranging from 500 to 1,000 yuan ($70-140), they drew thousands of applications from young people seeking alternative career paths.

Han explained that the destination has been introducing live NPCs during holidays since this year. "The appeal of pure natural landscapes is diminishing in today's market. We must shift from traditional sightseeing to immersive interactive experiences, and we've found that human interaction is key to breaking the old model."

Similarly, the Shennongjia Scenic Area in Hubei gained online fame with its "wild man" recruitment campaign. Shennongjia has long been associated with the "wild man," a mythical figure in ancient Chinese books, lending intrigue to the region for generations. This legend has now been creatively adapted into a show for immersive tourism experience.

According to the detailed job description, successful "wild man" candidates would work during July and August, their responsibilities including patrolling the scenic area in customized costumes and interacting with visitors exclusively through body language—not uttering a single word. The job pays 500 yuan per day and astonishingly received over 2,000 applications within the first 24 hours after the job posting was announced.

Online response was immediate and enthusiastic. Many netizens declared it the "ideal career"—a job requiring no talking and allowing justified improvisation. For countless young Chinese professionals weary of conventional workplace pressures, the position means getting paid to escape summer heat

XINHUA

Performers transform the Xinshi Ancient Town in Deqing County, Zhejiang Province, into a stage on October 25, offering audiences a unique immersive experience

while enjoying nature, perfectly aligning with their aspiration for flexible work.

Challenges and directions

According to statistics from the ILLUTHION International Immersive Industry Platform, a Chinese organization dedicated to providing full-chain solutions for the development of immersive experiences, 2023 was a turning point for China's immersive industry. As of late that year, the number of immersive experience projects in China had exceeded 32,000, an 81.5-percent increase compared to late 2019.

Beyond traditional scenic spots, multi-purpose venues have emerged to offer immersive experience. The Shanghai Film Park, which opened to the public in 2000, originally focused primarily on providing filming locations and set design services for movies and television series, with tourism accounting for just one third of its total revenue.

In 2022, due to a decline in its filming business, the park urgently needed to find new growth drivers. Cultural tourism, and immersive experiences in particular, became their strategic focus. That year, the Shanghai Film Park began developing immersive products, designating a specific area within the park to create *The Cage-Breaking Feast*. This groundbreaking immersive theatrical production, created by a talented young team from the Shanghai Theater Academy, gained instant acclaim when it premiered in 2022. Set in Shanghai in 1945 during the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the play features 15 main characters and over 100 subplots, performed by more than 40 actors.

To enhance authenticity and interactivity, the project incorporates elements rarely seen in traditional theater. Specific scents are diffused to match scenarios—when investigating a crime scene, players might detect a damp, musty smell that intensifies the scenario's realism and emotional impact.

During this year's October holiday, Tan Yang, a student from Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, participated in the play for four consecutive days, each time assuming a different role. "Even when the story concluded, I was so overwhelmed that I didn't want to leave," she told *China Newsweek* magazine.

This strategic transformation has fundamentally altered the Shanghai Film Park's business model. General Manager Lu Xuling said that before 2019, tourism, filming services and set design each contributed roughly one third to its total revenue. As of 2024, driven mainly by the explosive development of immersive content, the cultural tourism sector accounted for over half of its total revenue.

Despite the sector's exciting growth, challenges remain. Li Yongshun, a cultural industry analyst based in Shanghai, believes that for immersive experiences to be competitive, the key lies in creating genuinely captivating contents that resonates on social media platforms.

However, to his knowledge, an alarming 70-80 percent of Chinese immersive projects ultimately fail. Common reasons include over-reliance on marketing hype with lackluster content that fails to meet elevated market expectations, coupled with insufficient operational experiences and poor supporting services like dining options that lead to a rapid loss of target customers.

Yet the evolution of products continues to accelerate. According to Fu Yibin, Chairman of industry consultancy China Tourism Development Unit, the market is already preparing fourth-generation immersive products. "The deep integration of AI technologies, directors, scriptwriters and makeup artists will potentially customize content in real-time for players entering specific scenarios, offering truly personalized experiences that respond dynamically to individual choices," he said. **BR**

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Healing in Motion

The first undergraduate dance therapy program in China enrolls students

By Ji Jing

During a dance therapy class at Nanjing Normal University of Special Education (NNUSE), Liu Shanshan, Director of the Dance Therapy Teaching and Research Office, posed a question: "Can you describe your current physical and mental state in one word or sentence?" She then guided students through gentle movements designed to promote physical relaxation.

Dance therapy is one of the 29 new additions to the Ministry of Education's catalogue of undergraduate majors for general colleges and universities, updated in April. NNUSE is the first to launch the program, with its first cohort of students currently studying there.

Originating in Europe and the United States in the 1940s, dance therapy was initially employed in the rehabilitation of war veterans, including those with schizophrenia. The discipline entered China in the 1990s and has been offered alongside other expressive art therapies like music and painting.

Improving wellbeing

Dance therapy differs significantly from traditional dance. Zhang Qiang, Dean of the School of Music and Dance at NNUSE, told *People's Daily* newspaper, "Dance therapy does not prioritize the gracefulness or uniformity of movements." He further explained that "through scientific guidance, it helps people express emotions that are difficult to articulate, thereby achieving the objective of reshaping mind and body."

Dance therapy is an interdisciplinary applied discipline. It integrates principles from psychology, dance, medicine and rehabilitation science, utilizing bodily movements as a primary mode of communication. This discipline aims to facilitate the regulation of psychological states, improve emotional wellbeing, enhance social skills and foster healthy development.

Zhang explained that dance therapy has a broad range of applications, benefiting groups such as children with autism, Alzheimer's patients and individuals with social anxiety disorder (a mental health condition causing an intense fear of being judged or watched by people in social situations). It also supports those experiencing emotional distress. Dance therapy effectively aids in releasing suppressed emotions and repairing psychological trauma.

Liu further clarified the dual role of dance: "treatment" and "healing." "Treatment" focuses on individuals with diagnosed conditions, such as autism or cerebral palsy, where dance acts as a crucial intervention in their rehabilitation. "Healing," conversely, addresses those without a specific illness but enduring prolonged emotional distress, like suppressed emotions or low moods. In these cases, dance serves as a vital channel for stress release.

The palpable healing effects of dance are evident in teaching practice. Liu shared an example: At the beginning of the class, students often rate their physical and mental state as only 3-4 out of 10, but after dance activities, many report improvements to 8-9 out of 10.

"From the start to the end of the semester, they clearly perceive positive changes in their mind-body state," Liu observed.

"As university students, we often feel anxious, but Liu's class helps us relax," Hu Chengyu, a student at NNUSE, told *People's Daily*. "Young people today face significant mental pressure, and personally, I find dance therapy a highly effective way to alleviate it."

The Dance Therapy major in NNUSE is based on solid ground. Zhang said that the college has over 40 years of special education expertise and began offering dance healing courses more than a decade ago.

Through years of practice, teachers have witnessed transformative effects: autistic adolescents opening up through rhythmic movement and Parkinson's patients seeing improvements in walking.

The curriculum is comprehensive. Students will systematically study psychology, including general psychology and abnormal psychology (a branch of psychology that deals with psychopathology and abnormal behavior, or the patterns of emotion,

XINHUA

Senior citizens attend a dance class at a community elderly university in Guiyang City, Guizhou Province, on October 28

XINHUA

Students from Beijing Dance Academy play games with children with autism in Beijing on May 8 during the inauguration of a teaching base for dance therapy. The base is a collaboration between the dance academy, Jinyuyi Charity and the Monash University of Australia

thought and behavior that can be signs of a mental health condition). They will also learn modern dance, which emphasizes expression, freedom and individuality in movement, and Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), a core component of the new program.

Developed by Hungarian dance artist and theorist Rudolf Laban in the early 20th century, LMA is a framework and language for describing, visualizing, interpreting and documenting all varieties of human movement. It offers a systematic and comprehensive approach to understanding motion, encompassing both its physical and expressive dimensions.

During the students' first semester of senior year, they will complete internships at relevant medical institutions, rehabilitation centers, special education schools and community eldercare facilities.

"Although dance therapy is an emerging field in China, it holds significant potential for application and promising prospects for development, driven by increasing social pressure, growing health awareness and the advancement of special education," Liu said.

Potential and challenges

Dance therapy has broad development prospects, according to Zhang. He said graduate careers include medical rehabilitation, participating in psychosomatic illness treatment in general hospitals, or offering auxiliary treatment for anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders in psychiatric or neurological hospitals. In education, they can assist children with autism in developing social skills at special education schools or design emotion management courses for regular primary and secondary schools to support students' psychological wellbeing. Graduates can also work in elderly care to help slow cognitive decline, design stress-reduction programs for corporate employees in high-pressure environments, or become independent dance therapists.

However, despite its potential, the development of dance therapy still faces challenges.

Li Jing, an instructor specializing in art therapy at the School of Public Health and Management of Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine, told *Yicai* magazine that issues such as the lack of an official professional certification system indicate that dance therapy in China is still in its early stages. Supply falls far short of demand, industry competition remains insufficient, and the field's appeal to talent is still weak.

To address these challenges, Li said it is necessary to integrate dance therapists into the healthcare and education systems, establish dedicated positions instead of having them filled part-time by dance teachers or rehabilitation specialists, and create clear career advancement pathways. **BR**

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Pop-Up Crush

Temporary stores are rewriting the rules of retail By Zhang Yage

A vibrant thread of young Chinese shoppers, chatting excitedly, snaked past luxury boutiques and coffee shops. At the head of the queue, nestled in a prime corner of Beijing's China World Mall, stood the reason for their patience: a pastel-colored pop-up store for Jellycat, the British plush toy brand. Among those in line was Liu Zhaoyuan, a 24-year-old graphic designer, who had taken an afternoon off work specifically for this visit.

"I've become a big fan of Jellycat since I graduated from college and have collected eight different Jellycat toys, including the chips from its London edition and the strawberry milkshake and cheesecake from its New York City edition," Liu told *Beijing Review*. "I just can't turn down the combination of a cute toy and the joy of owning something that is limited and exclusive."

Her reward for an hour's waiting was a special edition rabbit, its ear delicately embroidered with Chinese roses, the official flower of Beijing. "It feels like a little piece of the city. And knowing that the store is only here for a few weeks makes it more special." Liu added.

SCREENSHOT

A post on lifestyle sharing platform RedNote shows the pop-up store of *Suan Niao* (Garlic Bird), a beloved IP among residents of Wuhan City in Hubei Province

A pop-up store is a temporary retail space, often described as a "guerrilla" tactic in marketing. It's designed to create a sense of urgency and exclusivity, "popping up" for a limited time, from a few days to several months, before disappearing. Its primary goals are to generate buzz, foster direct brand engagement and test new markets or products without the long-term commitment of a traditional lease.

Beyond transactional spaces

Jellycat's clever fusion of universal appeal and local sentiment has turned its temporary shops into social media phenomena across China. But these fluffy creatures represent something far more important: China's accelerating embrace of pop-up retail.

Pop-ups that tap into a city's distinct local narrative often prove most powerful in capturing the public's imagination and this strategy of pop-ups leveraging civic pride extends well beyond botanical motifs. A case to the point is *Suan Niao* (Garlic Bird), an IP featuring a small bird with a garlic clove on its head. Originating from the Hubei Provincial Museum, the character's name is a play of a high-frequency expression in the daily life of Wuhan locals—"*suan le*" (let it be), which, in the local language, sounds like "*Suan Niao*," nodding to a relaxed and easy-going attitude in the capital city of Hubei. This uniquely local resonance, encapsulated in the cute and quirky design, has earned the character the affectionate title of Wuhan's Dove of Peace among netizens.

Take Me Home, a pop-up store born from a collaboration between Garlic Bird and the Wuhan Small Animal Protection Association, combined people's love for *Suan Niao* with their compassion for stray animals. The space featured a photo exhibition unveiling the harsh reality of stray animals struggling for survival and their better life after being rescued and cared for. The store also launched a black Hug Cat plush that symbolizes a rescued stray animal. Seven percent of the revenue from each *Suan Niao* product sold was donated to animal rescue efforts.

In Shanghai, pop-up stores have become an extension of event experience and fan economy.

During famous singer Jay Chou's Carnival world tour in Shanghai, held from September 13 to October 12, Finding Zhoutongxue pop-up stores were set up in the municipality's major shopping malls, such as Oriental Pearl Tower, MetroCity and Shanghai Joy City. Zhoutongxue, meaning Classmate Chou, is the anime version of the superstar. These pop-up stores have been extremely popular, with a variety of co-branded products and Shanghai-exclusive items selling out quickly among fans. The co-branded apparel that is a collaboration between Zhoutongxue and the streetwear brand BONELESS was sold out on the first day.

ZHANG YAGE

The Jellycat pop-up store in China World Mall in Beijing on October 19

"I bought T-shirts from the pop-up not only for myself, but for some other fans who can't come to the concert in person," Li Shengrui, a fan who attended the concert on October 9, told *Beijing Review*. "It feels so great to have some souvenirs that are tied to this precious experience. Even if I could attend another Jay Chou concert in the future, the pop-up products would be different."

What explains the magnetic pull of these here-today, gone-tomorrow retail experiences?

"Unlike previous generations who prioritized functional utility, today's young consumers, especially Gen Zs, place greater emphasis on emotional satisfaction," Wei Feng, a professor at Tongji University's School of Economics and Management, told local news portal Shanghai Observer. "They aren't just buying a product; they're buying an experience, a story and a piece of social currency."

Strategic tools

This emotional engagement creates powerful commercial opportunities. As Xu Anxin, a professor of digital economy at Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University, told newspaper *Fuzhou Evening News*: "The limited-time nature of pop-ups creates a sense of urgency, and their immersive environments transform shopping from pure transaction to unique experience. Consumers come mainly to participate in something special; and the spaces, decor, product design, staff clothing and even background music should be able to resonate with customer feelings."

For retailers, pop-ups offer more than just buzz. They provide valuable market intelligence. Pan Ruyi, manager of a McDonald's restaurant in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, describes them as a strategic engine that boost product popularity in an increasingly competitive landscape.

In August, the McDonald's on Huagong Road, where Pan works, was transformed into Fujian's first McDonald's Pop-up Island flagship restaurant. The outlet introduced limited-time strawberry and vanilla milkshakes and was redecorated with themed installations, including a hamburger-shaped dessert station, creating a holiday vibe for patrons and echoing the coastal province's character.

"Through innovative marketing and immersive experiences, pop-ups allow us to test new concepts and engage directly with consumers," Pan told *Fuzhou Evening News*. "The pop-up generated unprecedented social media engagement while providing crucial consumer feedback this summer. We might try another pop-up in the future."

Xu emphasized the operational advantages of pop-ups: "Pop-ups enable brands to maintain freshness and relevance without the long-term commitment of traditional retail. They're laboratories for innovation, allowing companies to validate concepts before scaling up."

Despite their popularity, pop-ups face growing pains. On social media platform RedNote, some consumers have complained of premium prices for mediocre quality. Others have noticed repetitive designs as the format becomes mainstream.

"Some products from pop-up stores are overpriced, as I discovered before; and because the store would be already closed if I find out quality problems, I cannot return the products or file complaints, which isn't the case with permanent stores, for you always know where to return the product," Liu admitted. "Sometimes these problems give ordinary customers, who are not so crazy about pop-ups in the first place, second thoughts."

"Market and quality challenges are inevitable in any rapidly growing sector," Xu said. "The solution lies in greater collaboration between brands, mall operators and urban planners. The market will naturally filter out weaker offerings, so we must cultivate standards that reward creativity and quality."

Wei added that long-term success requires deeper understanding of consumer psychology: "As the novelty wears off, pop-ups must deliver genuine value, whether through unique products, meaningful experiences or authentic storytelling. The emotional connection must be more than superficial." **BR**

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Ancient Radiance

An ongoing exhibition at the Capital Museum in Beijing is showcasing gold ornaments from the Hong Kong Palace Museum (HKPM), which houses objects from the Palace Museum in Beijing and other important cultural institutions around the world.

Through the display of more than 170 artifacts produced over three millennia, the exhibition explores cultural exchange and integration in ancient times. The artifacts, donated to the HKPM by the Mengdiexuan Collection, a Hong Kong-based private collection, are being exhibited on the Chinese mainland for the first time. **BR**

(*Text and photos by Wei Yao*)

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Comments to weiyao@cicgamericas.com

1. An ornament from the seventh-ninth century depicts a mounted archer

2. A visitor views a virtual reality exhibit on ancient gold processing

3. A cloud and phoenix hair pin dating back to the Song Dynasty (906-1279)

4. A crown dating back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

Is It Necessary to Distinguish Female Cabin Crew Based on Marital Status?

LI SHAONG

Recently, the Spring Airlines official website listed the job requirements for new female cabin crew, stating the age limit as 25-40 and referring to them as *kongsao* rather than the conventional *kongjie*. *Kong* comes from the Chinese word for aviation (*hangkong*), while *jie* means elder sister and *sao* means elder brother's wife.

The Shanghai-based airline stressed the change of addresses was made to avoid suggesting applicants should be unmarried and child-free but there is no difference in the job description. The objective, it said, is to optimize cabin service for passengers because *kongsao* can be more experienced in taking care of children.

It also noted it initiated its first *kongsao* recruitment in October 2010 and subsequently released several recruitment notices seeking *kongsao*.

While the change in term is not new, once the news spread, it sparked intense debate, focusing on whether it's necessary to define the married and child-bearing stewardesses as *kongsao*, instead of continuing the old address *kongjie*.

Yu Xinping (People.com.cn): When *kongjie* is already a widely used and accepted address for female cabin crew, calling a particular group *kongsao* gives the impression that they're being singled out and labeled. Many people argue that the *kongsao* nickname is unnecessary, saying that being a member of cabin crew is a profession in itself and has nothing to do with whether someone has children, or that if they do the same job, there's no reason to change the title.

Some people argue that when a group is labeled, it can lead to that cohort being stigmatized. Calling young women *kongjie* while calling older ones *kongsao* inadvertently exposes deep-rooted age and gender bias among many people.

People's frustration with this labeling has shaped a shared consensus: In the service industry, professional competence should not be defined by age, gender or marital status, and eliminating unnecessary labels and classifications will make employment more equitable.

Shi Yimin (*China Youth Daily*): In terms of their responsibilities and duties, *kongjie* and *kongsao* are identical. Thus, the public need not worry that calling some cabin crew *kongsao* will create new employment discrimination, nor should they become overly fixated on the label itself.

For years, cabin crew have been burdened with a host of extra expectations. The label "young and attractive" has become a conspicuous tag attached to this profession. Yet an overemphasis on "youth and beauty" can unknowingly or deliberately eclipse their core responsibilities, and it undermines efforts to build a healthy, sustainable career path for them.

According to Spring Airlines, *kongsao* possess strong interpersonal affinity and adaptability, giving them an advantage in serving children and handling emergencies.

In 2018, Spring Airlines released stories of the many *kongsao* who have performed well and been promoted. One applied at age 40, joined the airline, within two years rose to the rank of chief flight attendant, and advanced to a higher position later. Many of the *kongsao* Spring Airlines has recruited have been promoted to managerial positions.

Ensuring passenger safety, communicating amicably with passengers and managing both routine and emergency situations are the foremost duties for cabin crew. After all, when encountering issues at 10,000 meters, no passenger will care whether the crew member is a *kongjie* or a *kongsao*. They value only the smile that accompanies the settlement of the problem. **BR**

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